BBC

THE **SPECTACULAR** STORY OF **SUTTON HOO**

HISTORY MAGAZINE

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DISSOLUTION

Why **Henry VIII** waged war on the monasteries

BLITZ SPIRIT?

Lucy Worsley on the unvarnished reality of life during the German raids

From curing cows to raising the dead: the miracles of Henry VI

Dark ages

The mysteries of post-Roman Britain

A hatful of horrors

The Victorian headwear craze that led to **mass slaughter**

Thank you, Sylvia

Sylvia left a gift in her Will to help conquer Stroke

The first we knew of Sylvia was when we received notification of the gift she'd left us in her Will. Shortly after, a beautiful story of a much-loved woman began to unfurl.

Friends remembered Sylvia's kind-heart and her wish to help others. She spent part of her adult-life caring for her mother, and developed a passion for medicine. Becoming a medical secretary was her next step and, in the course of her career, she discovered the devastating impact a stroke could have on people and their families. She saw that research and treatment were vastly under-funded, and she decided to remember the Stroke Association in her Will.

Sylvia's gift has helped fund our work to conquer stroke. She's supported research to prevent and treat stroke, and she's helped care for survivors. And that's something you can do too – in the same way.

If you would like to learn more about remembering the Stroke Association in your Will, please get in touch.

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WELCOME

BBC HISTORY MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2021

One of the great tragedies of the Tudor age was **Henry VIII's destruction of the monasteries**, which saw more than 800 religious houses suppressed. The evidence of these actions is plain to see in the ruined buildings that still dot the landscape today. But the story of the Dissolution is not so clear cut, and, as Hugh Willmott argues in this month's cover feature, this was not just a "smash and grab raid". By exploring the archaeological evidence – from buried lead ingots to the skeletons of crushed dogs – Hugh offers a more nuanced picture of events. Turn to page 20 for that.

Archaeological discoveries also lie behind new history film *The Dig*, which is about to be released on Netflix. It focuses on the **excavations at Sutton Hoo in 1939**, which saw astonishing seventh-century treasures unearthed, among them the famous Sutton Hoo helmet. On page 40, Martin Carver and David Musgrove describe the fascinating cast of characters who raced to uncover these objects as the shadow of war approached.

Just over a year later, that war had well and truly arrived in Britain as its cities endured brutal **German bombing raids**. How Britons coped under fire is particularly topical today, with frequent references to the **"Blitz spirit"** in discussions of the pandemic. Lucy Worsley's latest BBC TV documentary explores this further, and on page 35, she shares the experiences of six Londoners during those dark days.

I hope you enjoy the issue.

Rob Attar
Editor

THIS ISSUE'S CONTRIBUTORS

Hugh Willmott
I am fascinated by the Dissolution of the Monasteries and have spent the last decade studying the subject, conducting excavations at Thornton Abbey and Monk Bretton Priory.
Hugh argues that the Dissolution was not wanton destruction, but instead a highly organised undertaking **on page 20**

Elma Brenner
I was keen to investigate the lived experience of childbirth in the Middle Ages, and the medical expertise, divine assistance and community support that women drew upon at this time of both joy and danger.
Elma shares six ways that medieval women readied themselves for childbirth **on page 50**

Malcolm Smith
When I started researching the impact of the hat feather trade on wildlife, I was astonished at the scale of the killing. Some species were driven to near extinction. And all for fashion.
Malcolm explores the horrifying impact of the Victorians' fixation with feathered hats **on page 58**

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COVER: THE RUINS OF RIEVAULX ABBEY, NORTH YORKSHIRE, ARE ILLUMINATED BY A LIGHT INSTALLATION, SEPT 2018: PHOTO BY IAN FORSYTH–GETTY IMAGES. SUTTON HOO HELMET: GETTY IMAGES.. THIS PAGE: STEVE SAYERS/BBC

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GETTY/BRITISH MUSEUM/BRIDGEMAN

To find out more about the seventh-century treasure trove unearthed at Sutton Hoo, turn to page 40

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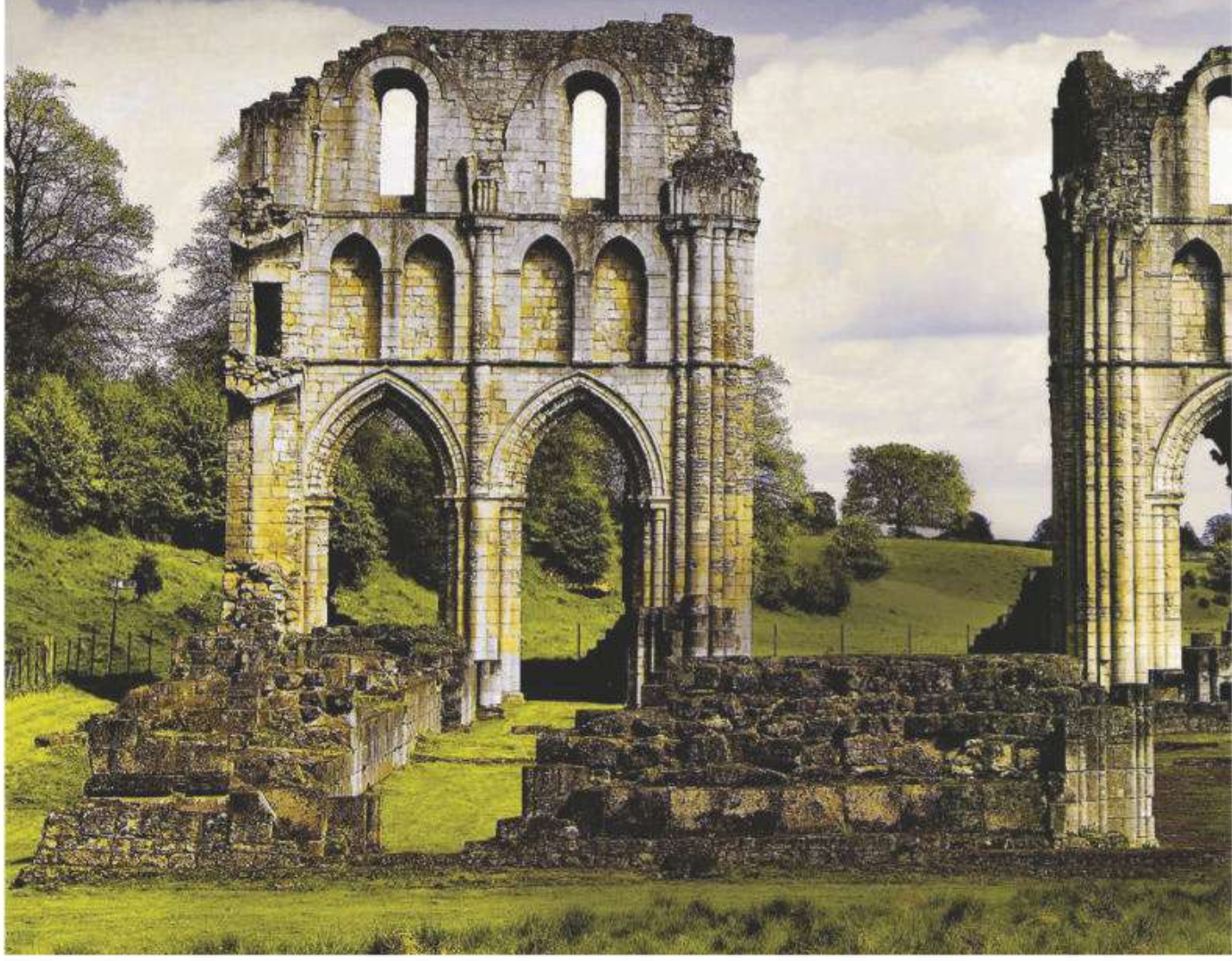

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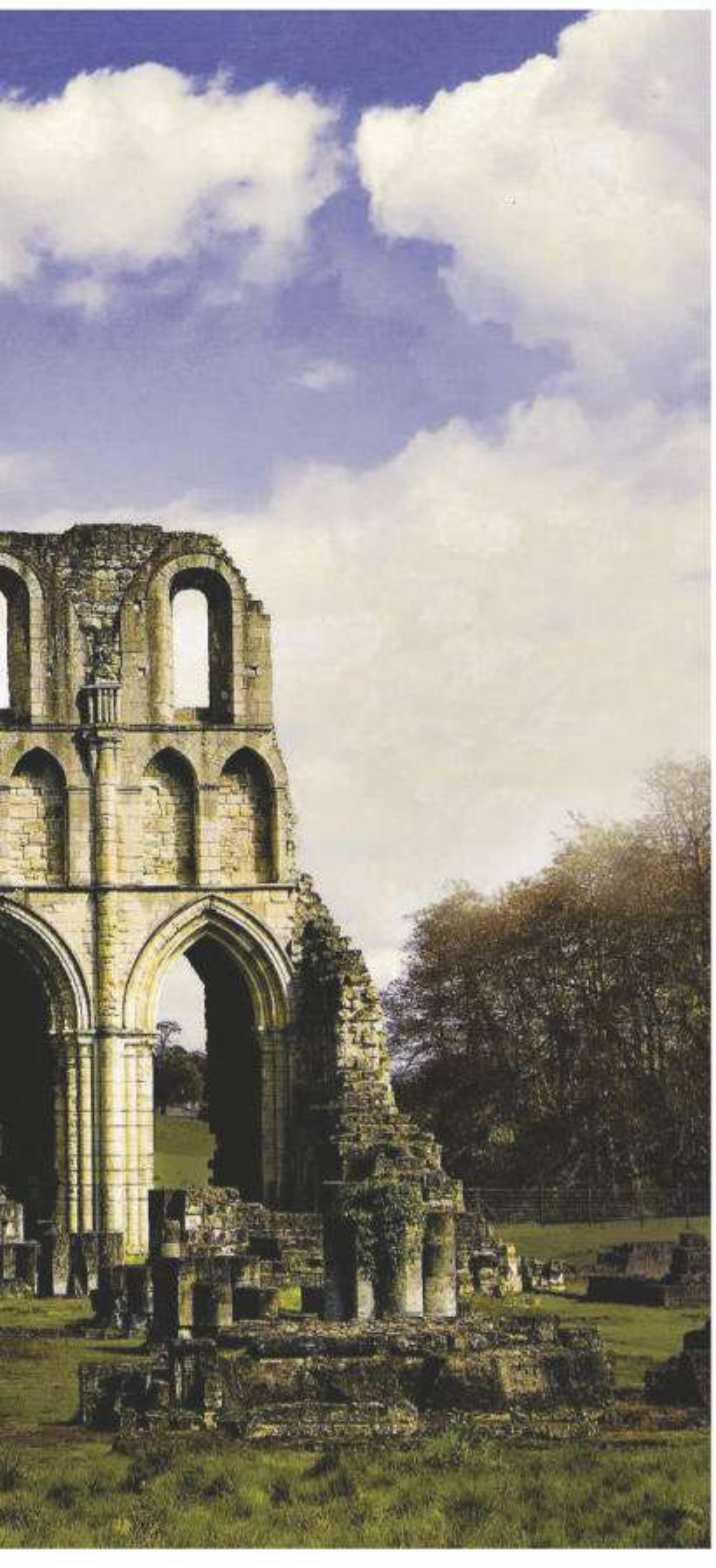

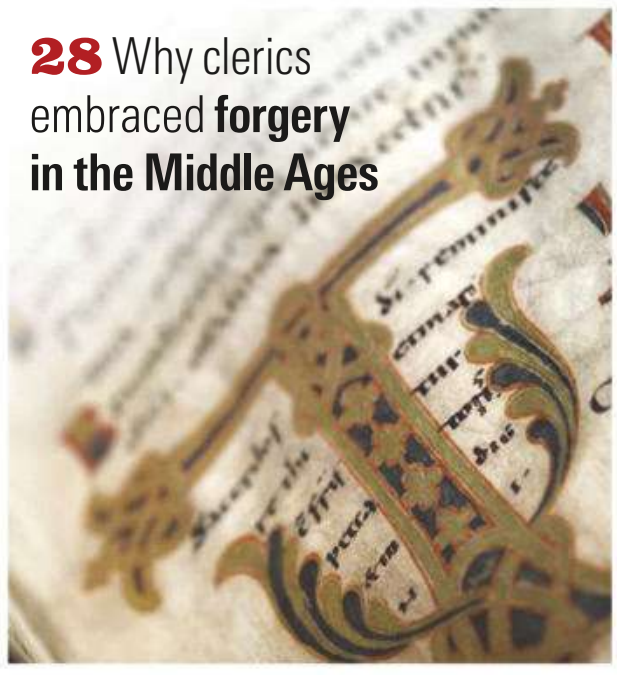

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Tablets – helping you be closer to your loved ones...

Tablets – iPads and Android tablets – can be great once you know how to use them. It's amazing all the things they can do.

And possibly the best thing tablets can do for you is help you keep in touch with family and friends. I don't just mean letting you send emails instead of writing paper letters, though that can be handy.

In just a few taps of the screen you could be talking to them as if they were sat right there beside you.

But when you buy a tablet, there's something missing.

It's not the charger (hopefully!).

It's not a case, though it's usually a good idea to buy one to protect your new tablet.

It's a manual – something to show you how to use the thing. The manufacturers seem to assume that you'll just know how to use it, as if by magic. It's "intuitive," they say.

Well, it can be. In parts. But there are other things you simply need to know how to do. It's not obvious that you have to swipe from the top of the screen, pull up from the bottom or tap with two fingers instead of one.

Who would know you had to use two fingers and pull them apart on the screen or rotate them... or that they'd bury the option you want behind three little dots?

Things like that you just can't know – someone has to explain it to you.

But if you do ever find a book about it or get someone to tell you, they always seem to assume you already know how to do it. Daft, really – you wouldn't be asking if you did. But they whizz through it so fast you can't possibly take it in. Not to mention the steps they leave out because "everyone knows that"!

That's where a set of books from a small, employee-owned company based in Cumbria comes in. They're called The Helpful Book Company and lots of their customers say they certainly live up to their name!

They've published *iPads One Step at a Time* and *Android Tablets One Step at a Time* – and these books have proved hugely popular with all sorts of people who have a tablet – but who aren't experts at using it.

These helpful books mean there's nothing to fear about using tablets – from sending a quick email to video calling your family and friends.

Whether you're frustrated with the very basics, want to know what else it can do for you or wish you knew how to do some of the slightly fancier things, this book might be just what you need.

It explains everything nice and simply, in plain English, without all the confusing jargon and gobbledegook. And it has lots of pictures showing exactly what to do – where to tap the screen and so on.

> "Plain English without all the confusing jargon and gobbledygook"

The company have already published books about computers and smartphones that have helped thousands of people. But they actually started much smaller – the author wrote some notes to help his Mum and Dad on their PC and realised that other people might find them useful too. Several thousand happy people later, he decided to bring out a book on tablets as well – and if you've ever been frustrated with your tablet, it's worth finding out more.

As a small independent publisher, the books aren't in the shops or available on Amazon, but you can get a free information pack telling you about what's covered in the books, who they're suitable for and how to get hold of them.

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THIS MONTH IN HISTORY

EYE-OPENER

Cross examination

When it was plucked from the earth of the Scottish region of Dumfries and Galloway in 2014, this ninth-century cross was coated in centuries of soil and far from its former glory. But now, thanks to an extensive restoration process, the skill of its creators has been revealed.

Each of the Anglo-Saxon artefact's arms features an intricate gold-leaf design representing the New Testament evangelists: an eagle (John), a lion (Mark), a man (Matthew) and a cow (Luke). Experts think that such a detailed work must have been commissioned by a high-ranking member of society, such as a priest or king.

The cross, along with the rest of the Galloway Hoard of which it is part, is set to go on display at the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh from 19 February. For more details, see *nms.ac.uk*.

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TALKING POINTS

A right royal ruckus

Hit Netflix drama *The Crown* has caused a stir thanks to its use of dramatic licence in depicting the lives of the royal family. But does it matter? **ANNA WHITELOCK** followed the debate

It's arguable, of course, that the lives of the British royal family are already stranger than fiction. They may be elite and some may think them eccentric, but are they as scandalous as *The Crown* – the fourth series of which debuted on Netflix in November – suggests? Such was the question that has exercised many over the past few weeks, not least the culture secretary Oliver Dowden who called on Netflix to add a disclaimer that the series is drama, rather than reality.

Former royal press secretary **Dickie Arbiter** (@RoyalDickie) supported Dowden. "No one has the right to embellish [the facts] about living people for the sake of drama," he wrote. "There is a very definite line between fact and fiction and @TheCrownNetflix has gone beyond that to the point of dishonesty, which is unacceptable even for drama."

Dr Michael Waldron (@michaeljwaldron), however, thought it was all a storm in a royal teacup, writing that he was "bewildered by current fretting over the accuracy of *The Crown*. Like all historical dramas, it dramatises historical moments and figures. It has always been clear that the inner lives of the characters are fictionalised. It is not documentary. Nor is it memoir. It's drama."

ITV's royal editor **Chris Ship** (@chrisshipitv) was more sympathetic to Dowden's disclaimer. "When you see the excellent work that *The Crown* has put into recreating some of the moments in history on which to base their fictional drama – you can see why many might think it's fact!" **Rafael Behr** (@rafaelbehr) wondered "if some anger at factual inaccuracy in *The Crown* is a function of people intuitively feeling that the events it depicts are more recent than they actually are. Feels more an offence to rewrite history when dust not yet settled."

Join the debate at **twitter.com/historyextra**

David Andress (@ProfDaveAndress), meanwhile, was "tempted to go all Jean-Jacques Rousseau [about] the kerfuffle… If you show people things in a convincing enough manner, some will believe they've been shown the truth – almost certainly even if you start by telling them it isn't." **Dr Laura McAtackney** (@LMcAtackney) concurred. "It is incredible how persuasive on-screen representations of the past can be, especially when they suit preconceived narratives… Given [that] most people don't study (or know the ins and outs) of it, TV does matter."

And so, of course, does historical expertise. As **Greg Jenner** (@greg_jenner) noted: "I find it really surprising that no TV network has noticed that viewers desperately want to know which bits are real and which bits are made up. Wikipedia data show that historical page hits skyrocket when popular TV shows are broadcast." That is true: my inbox has been full of requests for interviews on the veracity of *The Crown*. Like them or not, the royal family certainly get us talking!

Emma Corrin as Princess Diana in *The Crown*. Twitter users debated whether the drama should hew more closely to historical fact

"It has always been clear that the characters' inner lives are fictionalised. It is drama, not documentary"

Camilla Townsend, whose book *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* has won a prestigious literary award

BOOKS

Aztec history wins major book prize

A study of the lives of the Aztecs that draws on their own records has been announced as the winner of this year's Cundill History Prize.

Camilla Townsend's *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* was revealed as the recipient of the $75,000 award in an online event in December. The distinguished professor of history at Rutgers University triumphed ahead of fellow finalists William Dalrymple, for *The Anarchy: The Relentless Rise of the East India Company*, and Vincent Brown, for *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. The decision was made by chair of the jury Peter Frankopan and jurors Anne Applebaum, Lyse Doucet, Eliga Gould and Sujit Sivasundaram.

***Fifth Sun* explores more than 300 years of history, from the years before 1299 to the changes that took place after the Spanish invasion in 1519–21. Focusing on the lives of individual Aztec people, it considers that conquest as part of a wider story that continues to have resonance in the region today.**

"*Fifth Sun* is one of those books that, when you're reading it, you sometimes put down and pause for a moment to absorb the beauty of the words and the imagery," said Doucet. "This is history at its best: taking us back [to a past] we thought that we understood but now realise that we're only just beginning to scratch the surface."

Our website, HistoryExtra, is a media partner of the prize, and you can hear Townsend discuss her book on our daily podcast. You can find that at *historyextra.com/podcast*

ESTI LAMM/NETFLIX

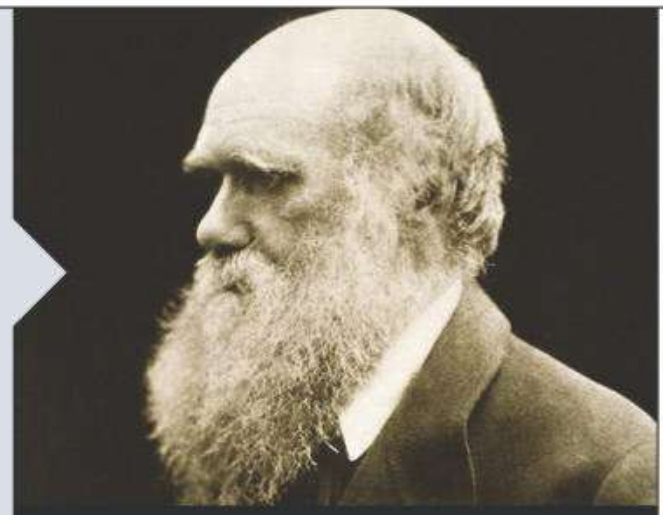
HISTORY IN THE NEWS

A selection of the stories hitting the **history headlines**

Darwin's notebooks have been lost for 20 years, library reveals

Two notebooks written by 19th-century scientist Charles Darwin have been missing for two decades, Cambridge University Library has revealed.

The postcard-size journals were created by Darwin in the 1830s, and include his "Tree of Life" diagram, sketching the relationship between different species. They were last seen in the library in November 2000, when an internal request was made to remove them from a dedicated manuscript storeroom for photographing. Although a routine check early in 2001 revealed them to be missing, it was initially thought that they had been returned but misfiled. Several searches of the library's 200km of shelving followed before current director of library services, Dr Jessica Gardner, launched another attempt early in 2020. The team "completely reviewed what happened at the time", said Gardner. Yet it, too, found nothing, and it's now thought the documents were stolen. The library has tightened security protocols and informed Cambridgeshire Police – and is appealing to the public for any information.



Searches for Charles Darwin's missing notebooks have thus far drawn a blank

Dig uncovers duo in Pompeii ash

The well-preserved remains of two men have been found in the remains of Pompeii. The younger, thought to have been between 18 and 25, had several crushed vertebrae, suggesting that he was either enslaved or worked as a manual labourer, while the older was in his thirties. Both are believed to have died trying to escape the explosion of Mount Vesuvius in AD 79, and are the latest discoveries made during an ongoing excavation of a villa located near the edge of the ancient Roman city.

The remains of the men in Pompeii – both of whom were killed by a volcanic blast a day after Vesuvius first erupted

Teaching of black history "focuses too much on slavery"

School lessons about themes relating to people of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) heritage place too much emphasis on slavery and colonialism, according to a new report commissioned by the Welsh government. The report suggested that a focus on such events should be balanced with "wider histories of black, Asian and minority ethnic communities in Wales", and highlighted "major gaps" in resources relating to BAME themes.

Cardiff schoolchildren, c1955. A new report identifies "major gaps" in the teaching of BAME history in Wales

Gloucestershire mosaic casts new light on the "Dark Ages"

Radiocarbon dating of material uncovered at Chedworth Roman Villa in Gloucestershire indicates that a mosaic uncovered at the site was created in the fifth or sixth century AD – the first known example from that era to be found in Britain. The find is particularly important because it suggests that the decline in sophisticated living usually associated with the period in which Roman rulers left Britain may have been more gradual than previously thought. H

A mosaic floor found in what's thought to have been the summer dining room of Chedworth Roman Villa

Expert "finds home of Jesus"

A house in a crypt in the city of Nazareth may be the childhood home of Jesus, a University of Reading archaeologist suggests. The site, located beneath both a Byzantine-era church and a modern-day convent, was first linked to the historical Jesus in the 19th century, but experts largely ignored it until Ken Dark launched a project to investigate it in 2006. Dark points to a seventh-century AD pilgrim's account, which indicates that the church was built on the site of Jesus' childhood home.

The house, in Nazareth in Israel, was carved into the rock of a naturally occurring cave in the first century AD

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A constitutional crisis

The fraught transition of power from Donald Trump to Joe Biden has its roots in a decision, taken 230 years ago, to make the president an "elected king", argues **ADAM IP SMITH**. As Biden is set to be inaugurated, Adam traces the roots of the recent turmoil

On 4 March 1801, in the city of Washington – then just a half-built, muddy encampment on the banks of the Potomac – a living head of state gave up power peacefully and a new one took over. The outgoing president, John Adams, had lost a bitter election – the first presidential contest in the short history of the United States in which a sitting president had been defeated – and he was not a happy man. Once, Adams had regarded the incoming head of state, Thomas Jefferson, as a friend. But the election had pushed the bond between the two founding fathers to breaking point.

Jefferson's supporters, with the complicity of the candidate himself, charged that Adams was a quasi-monarchist. If he won a second term, with his centralising, authoritarian instincts, it would be tantamount to a repudiation of the Revolution, which had seen the 13 colonies of the United States win their independence from Britain following an eight-year war (1775–83). Adams' supporters, in turn, claimed that if the deist Jefferson won, God himself would be dethroned and (according to one Connecticut newspaper) "murder, robbery, rape, adultery and incest will openly be taught and practised".

The stakes, in other words, could barely have been higher. Both sides believed that the fate of the nascent American republic was on the line. Jefferson called his election "the Revolution of 1800".

And yet, when it became clear by the end of December 1800 that Adams would not have the Electoral College votes to be re-elected, and even though his defeat seemed to him to be a terrifying sign of the degeneration of the republic, he did not contemplate resisting the result. Before dawn on the morning of the inauguration of his nemesis, Adams left town. He couldn't bear to be present at the moment when his power was transferred, but at least he didn't fight it.

The Washington-based political commentator Margaret Bayard Smith wrote that she had "this morning witnessed one of the most interesting scenes a free people can ever witness. The changes of administration, which in every government and in every age have most generally been epochs of confusion, villainy and bloodshed, in this our happy country take place without any species of distraction, or disorder."

This was an exaggerated but understandable boast. In a monarchy, the transfer of power from one head of state to the next frequently happens without disorder because it takes place, quite literally, in a heartbeat. The declamation "The king is dead, long live the king!" provides the reassurance of seamless continuity. But it is of course true that the history of the classical world, of the Italian republics, and of England – the principal reference points for elite white Americans at the dawn of the 19th century – were hardly short of instances of bloody chaos attending the transfer of authority from one head of state to the next. The presidential transition of 1801 was the height of civilisation compared to the twisted and oft-told tale of English throne-toppling that took place over the century and a half from Edward II's ignominious removal in 1327 to Richard III's death at the battle of Bosworth in 1485.

The creators of the Federal Constitution under which, in its essential form, the United States has so far been

Political sketch An 1800 campaign banner for Thomas Jefferson, victor of the first US presidential election in which a sitting president was defeated

Positive spin Margaret Bayard Smith saw the peaceful transfer of power in 1801 as a sign of the republic's strength

ALAMY

A nation divided
Supporters of Donald Trump protest in Pennsylvania as the state's electoral college casts its votes, December 2020. Weeks after the election, Trump still disputed the result

GETTY IMAGES

governed for 232 years, made a conscious decision to create a strong executive presidency with a quasi-monarchical form. They did not have to do this – most radicals preferred the idea of a unicameral legislature (with just one chamber) and a weak executive, the better to represent the unfiltered interests of the people. But for the likes of John Adams, a "balanced" constitution in which the democratic element was constrained by a strong judicial and executive branch was more likely to provide stability.

In Adams' view, history showed that an excess of democracy led to dictatorship. As he wrote (in a book published before he became president), "where the people have a voice, and there is no balance, there will be everlasting fluctuations, revolutions and horrors, until a standing army, with a general at its head, commands the peace, or the necessity of an equilibrium is made appear to all, and is adopted by all."

Deliberately undemocratic

But the idea that a strong president would provide ballast to the ship of state against the inconstant gusts of public opinion was only true so long as the presidency did not itself become the object of contention.

Insulating the presidency from the hoi polloi was the job of the Electoral College – the indirect and deliberately undemocratic system of deciding upon the republic's head of state, in which the president is elected not by the voters themselves but by a group of electors selected by the American public.

The 1800 election was indeed hardly democratic (the franchise was restricted, and many states did not choose presidential electors through popular votes anyway). But the true source of the crisis that year was that the election was intensely, vitriolically, partisan. Precisely because the presidency was so powerful an office, controlling it seemed more important than controlling Congress (the bicameral legislature that consists of the House of Representatives and the Senate). Adams' faith in a strong executive had come back to bite him.

So, although Margaret Bayard Smith was right to see the peaceful transfer of power in 1801 as a sign of the republic's strength, the issue had only arisen because the constitution made the president into a sort of elected king, complete with pardon power and the capacity as commander-in-chief to raise an army. For the following 220 years, the period of transition from one head of state to the next has been fraught with the self-created potential for drama.

Some of that drama comes not from the fact of transferring power from one man to another (for it has always, of course, been a man, no doubt partly due to the machismo built into the powerful executive stereotype) but in the long transition period when the loser knows he's lost but remains in power. This is not an interregnum – that most dread of circumstances in

"The presidential transition of 1801 was the height of civilisation compared to the English throne-toppling that took place from 1327 to 1485"

Taking out the trash? President Roosevelt disposes of the policies of his predecessor, Herbert Hoover, in this 1933 cartoon. The difficult nature of that transition led Congress to shorten the process

a monarchy – but something potentially even more dangerous, since the outgoing head of state retains all the power but without the restraint of having to face an electorate ever again.

The delay between the election and the inauguration of the new president was sensible in the 18th century, given how long it took to ride a horse along muddy roads from New York or Boston down to Washington. The delay also reflected what the founders imagined to be the drawn-out process of selecting electors. But whatever its justification, the long political transition relies on implausible self-restraint on the part of the outgoing president.

In 1801, John Adams used the transition period to rush through a series of judicial appointments intended to constrain the incoming administration. In 1861, James Buchanan prevaricated while seven slaveholding states decided that the election of Abraham Lincoln in November 1860 was so provoking that they would unilaterally declare their independence from the United States.

"For the first time in the republic's history, an outgoing head of state has refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his electoral defeat"

In 1933, in the midst of the Great Depression, the inability of the outgoing president, Herbert Hoover, to deal effectively with the economic crisis for four long months prompted Congress to initiate a constitutional amendment moving the inauguration date forward by six weeks. But they didn't consider shortening it any further, no doubt in part because the sheer size of the federal government by the 20th century meant that incoming presidents had thousands of appointments to make, many of which required FBI checks and Congressional approval. Indeed, the 9/11 Commission concluded that the shortened period of transition between Bill Clinton and George W Bush (truncated because of the length of time it took to resolve the disputed election of 2000) contributed to the new administration's lack of preparedness for a terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda.

In 2020–21, for the very first time in the history of the republic, an outgoing head of state (Donald Trump) has refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of his electoral defeat (to Joe Biden). Even in 1860, the slaveholding states who left the Union did not dispute the legitimacy of Abraham Lincoln's election – they just thought that it was a hostile act by the northerners who had voted for him.

Now, for the first time, the United States has had a monarch, albeit an elected one, telling his supporters that his immense power has been taken from him by a usurper. Neither John Adams nor Margaret Bayard Smith would have been shocked that it had come to this, but they would certainly both have regarded it as the sign that the republican experiment had failed. H

Adam IP Smith is the Edward Orsborn professor of United States politics and political history and the director of the Rothermere American Institute at the University of Oxford

TOPFOTO

MICHAEL WOOD ON...
HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE NEW WORLD

"Behind the debate hovered one question: what is it to be human?"

I'm reading Camilla Townsend's *Fifth Sun*, which won the 2020 Cundill Prize, the biggest literary prize anywhere for history. A boldly imaginative attempt to tell the story of the Aztecs from indigenous sources, it raises fascinating issues. The Spanish conquest of the Americas opened up the world, marking the beginnings of a globalisation that was not only commercial, but also ideological and philosophical. For the first time in history, there was one world, whose peoples were now seen as subject to the same natural laws, the same processes of history. And in that light the Conquista raised profound moral dilemmas for Europeans in general. Was the conquest of the New World in any sense just? Did the "Indians" possess human rights? In grappling with these questions, 16th-century people made the first moves towards evolving a conception of universal human rights which was finally formulated in the UN Declaration of 1948.

Throughout the 1530s and 40s political theorists and theologians bombarded the Spanish king with advice on his colonial policy. Among them was the Dominican missionary Bartolomé de Las Casas, whose most famous work, *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*, was dedicated to the future king Philip II in 1542. Las Casas' book told the Spanish crown what was really happening in the Americas, and in its first-hand reporting it has the power of modern accounts of the genocides in Cambodia or Rwanda. Eventually the king's closest advisors decided the issue must be debated. It was a moment unparalleled in history.

Before the debate King Charles V did something without precedent in the story of imperialism. He ordered that Spanish conquests in the Americas be stopped with effect from 16 April 1550 until the matter had been thoroughly discussed by the best theologians, canon lawyers and jurists. So it came about that the two great adversaries, Las Casas and the philosopher Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, debated for a month in 1550 in the presence of the king's council. Behind it hovered one simple question: what is it to be human?

Las Casas, now 66, had seen firsthand the horrors of genocide in the Americas. His opponent Sepúlveda, a great theologian and humanist, had never been to the New World. For Sepúlveda the essential qualities of Spanish civilisation were "prudence, intelligence, magnanimity, moderation, humanity" – and Christianity. The native societies he saw as devoid of true civilisation, and hence virtually devoid of humanity – as Aristotle had said, "natural slaves".

"Don't delude yourselves," Sepúlveda said to the king's council, with the Aztecs in mind. "Don't think the Indians lived in an idyllic world before the Spanish came. On the contrary they waged continuous ferocious wars against each other – and practised cannibalism on the vanquished. And this is not to speak of their impious religion and the wicked sacrifices in which they worshipped the Devil as their god, in the belief that they could offer him no finer tribute than human hearts.

"How can there be any doubt that these peoples, so uncivilised, so barbarous, tainted by so many vices and corruptions, have been justly conquered by a nation that is most humane and excels in every kind of virtue?"

Las Casas scathingly dismissed Sepúlveda's idea that those who acted in King Charles' name were humane, noble people. Their cruelty indeed far exceeded the Aztecs. His fundamental argument was the conviction that the world is one; that human beings are the same, and all have the possibility of self-fulfilment and goodness.

Las Casas said: "No nation that exists, no matter how rude, uncivilised and barbarous, savage or brutal, cannot be persuaded into a good way of life – provided that the method used is that proper and natural to men, namely love, gentleness and kindness. For all the peoples of the world are human beings. And the definition of humans, collectively and severally, is one: that they are rational beings. All possess understanding and volition, being formed in the image and likeness of God, all have the natural capacity or faculties to understand and master the knowledge that they do not have… all take pleasure in goodness and all abhor evil. And no one is born enlightened. Thus all humankind is one."

Las Casas won the debate, no doubt. But the realities of power overruled the voices of morality, and of Christian conscience. In the end, the unworkable ban on the oppression of the native peoples was lifted. And still today across the world, the oppression continues. H

Michael Wood is professor of public history at the University of Manchester. He has presented numerous BBC series and his latest book is *The Story of China* (Simon & Schuster, 2020). He received an OBE for services to public history and broadcasting in the 2021 New Year Honours list

BBC

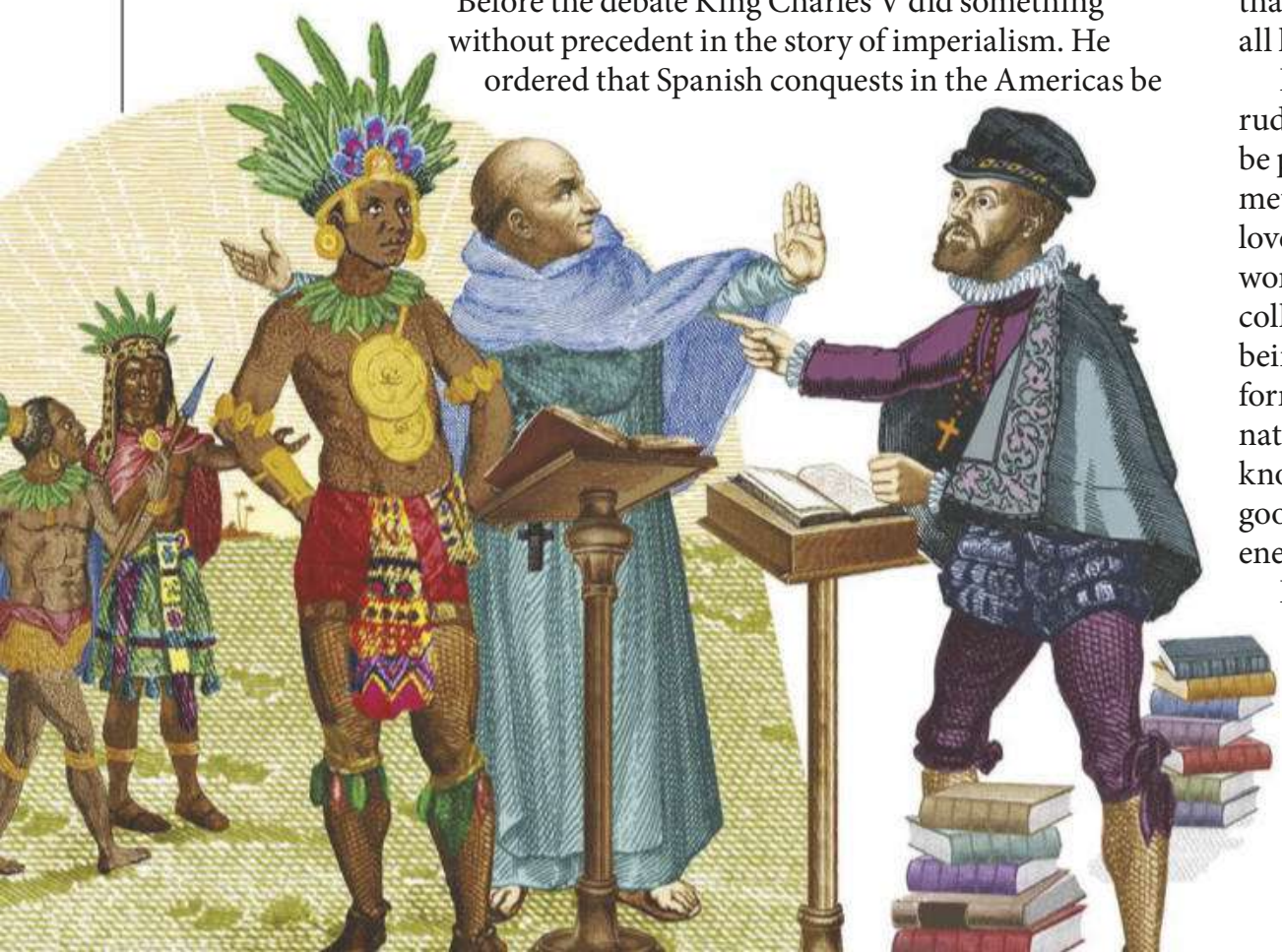


ILLUSTRATION BY **FEMKE DE JONG**

ANNIVERSARIES

DOMINIC SANDBROOK highlights events that took place in February in history

18 FEBRUARY 1478

The Duke of Clarence meets a sticky end

Edward IV's brother is apparently drowned in a barrel of wine

Even by the standards of medieval England, George, Duke of Clarence met a colourful end. "Take him on the costard with the hilts of thy sword," says one of his two murderers in Shakespeare's play *Richard III*, "and then throw him into the malmsey-butt in the next room."

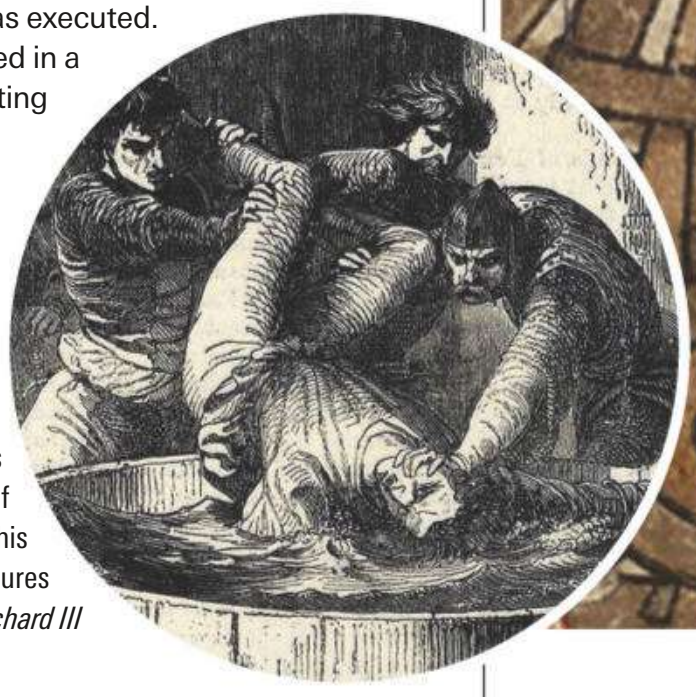
And so, for generations, the stage-Clarence has been stabbed repeatedly ("Take that, and that") before being dragged away to the barrel of sweet wine. "I'll drown you in the malmsey-butt within," says the First Murderer.

So who was Clarence? The short answer is that he was the brother of the Yorkist king Edward IV, but that doesn't convey his ambitious, slippery personality. During the 1460s he had been Edward's heir, but then they fell out. First Clarence joined Warwick the Kingmaker's rebellion; then he changed sides again and returned to Edward.

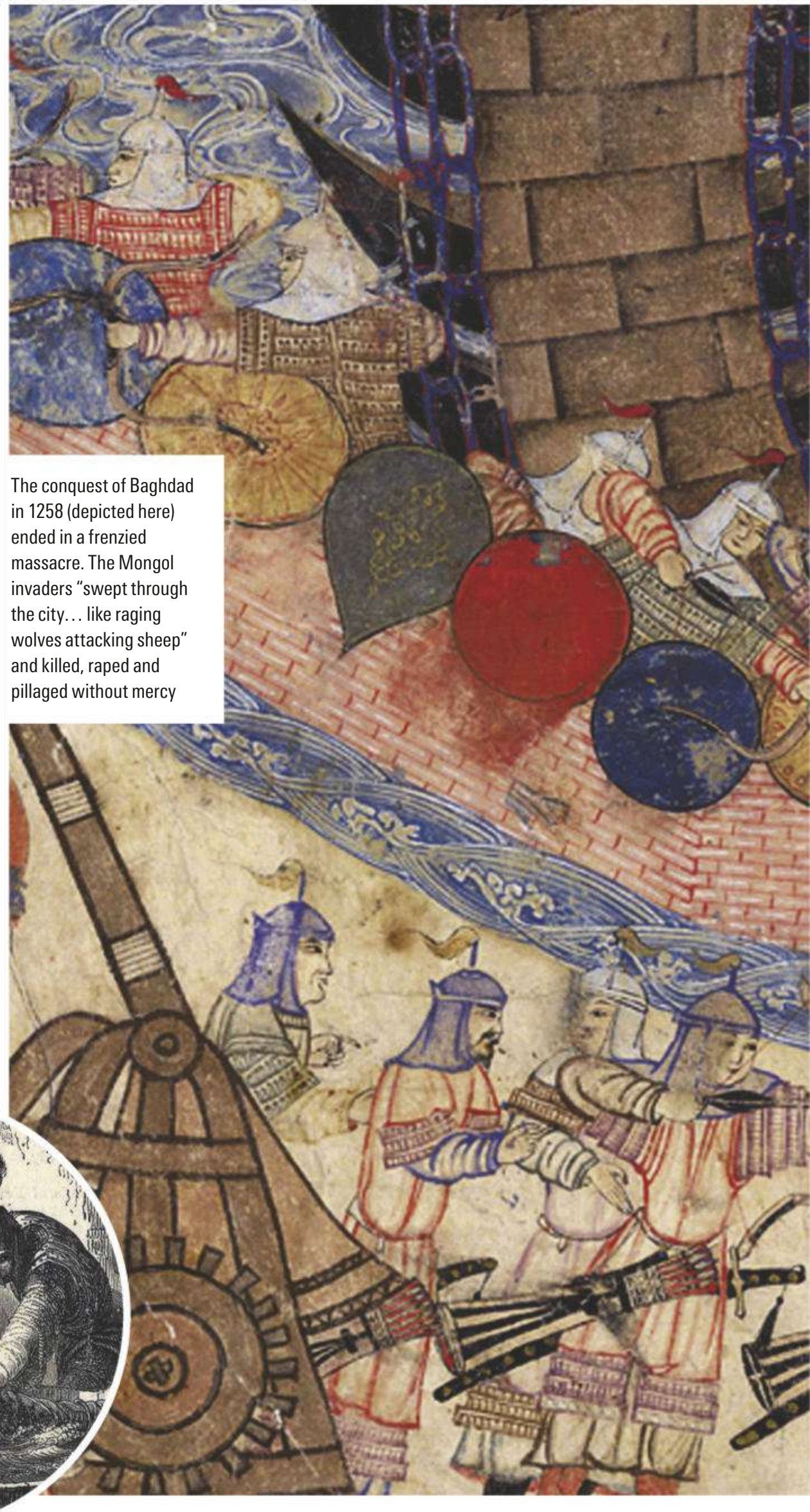
For the next six years or so, the two men managed to rub along. But by 1477 Edward's wife had had two sons, and Clarence's hopes of the succession were gone. He floated the idea of marrying the Duke of Burgundy's daughter, but Edward vetoed it.

And then, that summer, their relationship broke down completely. Clarence was dragged into the Tower of London, charged with "unnatural, loathly treasons". For months he lingered; then, on 18 February 1478, he was executed.

Was he really drowned in a butt of sweet wine? Writing only five years later, the Italian visitor Dominic Mancini said so. And who would invent such a bizarre story?



The Duke of Clarence is drowned in a barrel of sweet wine in this illustration. His death features in Shakespeare's *Richard III*



The conquest of Baghdad in 1258 (depicted here) ended in a frenzied massacre. The Mongol invaders "swept through the city… like raging wolves attacking sheep" and killed, raped and pillaged without mercy

ALAMY/GETTY IMAGES/AKG-IMAGES

A man carries election materials in Madrid, 1936. This was Spain's last free election for decades

16 FEBRUARY 1936

Amid escalating tensions, the **Spanish people vote in their last free election** for more than 40 years, producing a narrow plurality for the leftwing Popular Front. As a result, the republican Manuel Azaña takes over as prime minister – but only months later, **civil war breaks out**.

10 FEBRUARY 1258

Baghdad falls to the Mongol hordes

Invaders lay waste to the city in a frenzy of brutality

Baghdad! In the mid-13th century the City of Peace, capital of the Abbasid caliphate and beating heart of Islamic power was renowned as a city of mosques and minarets; music and mathematics; astronomy, alchemy, sweets and spices. No wonder, then, that its caliph, the ineffectual, complacent al-Musta'sim, scoffed when he heard a nomad army was approaching his capital. Baghdad's walls had stood for hundreds of years. Never would it fall to a foreign invader.

But the caliph was wrong. By the beginning of 1258, a colossal Mongol army was fast approaching, under their general, Hulagu. Their envoys delivered a final warning, demanding the caliph submit to save his people. But he refused, and the envoys were attacked in the streets of Baghdad.

So it was at the end of January that the Mongol siege engines opened the bombardment, raining down arrows and missiles, rocks and burning oil. By 1 February they had taken the entire eastern wall. Nine days later, al-Musta'sim surrendered. For his people, though, it was too late.

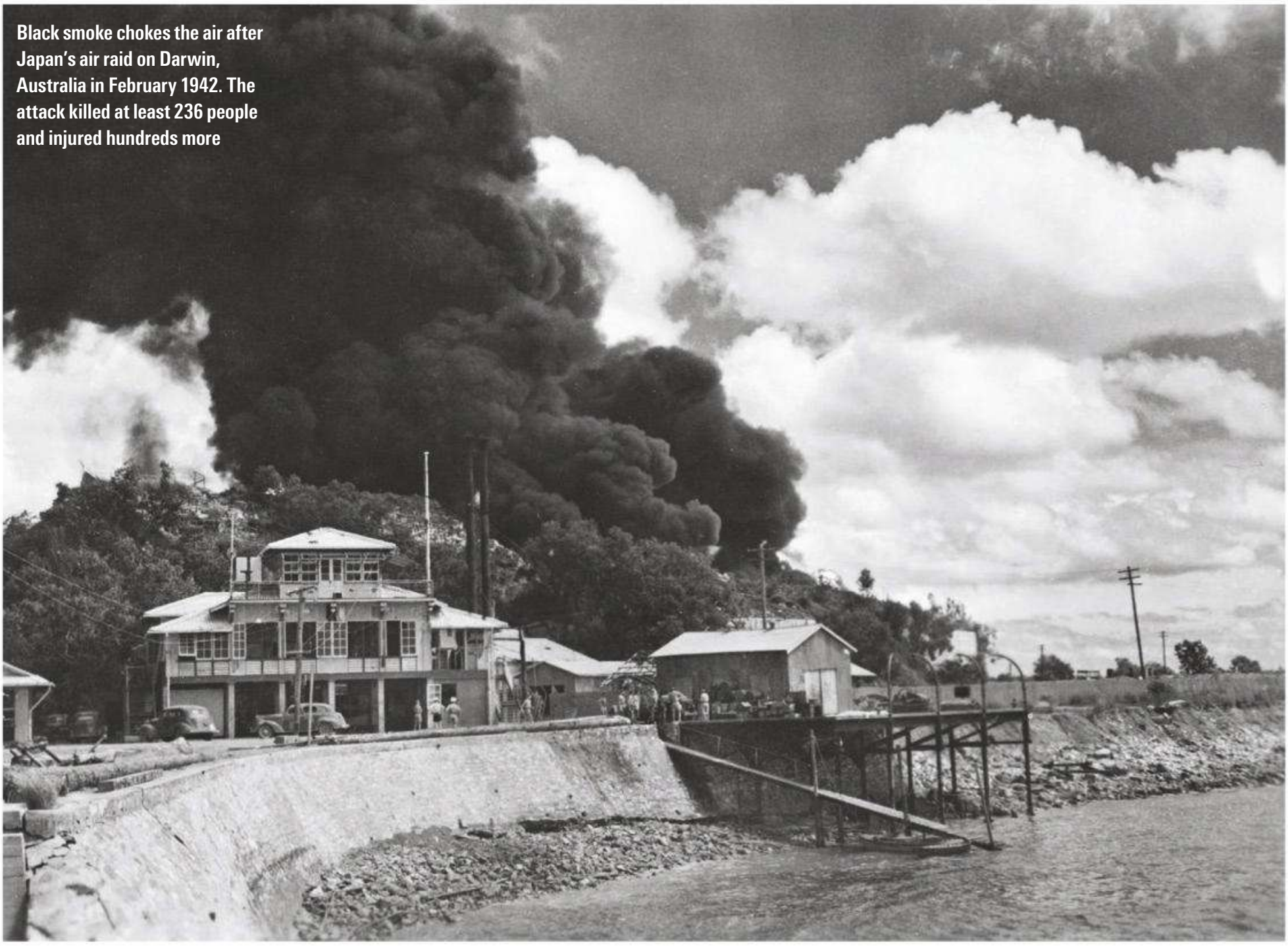
What happened next was one of the most frenzied massacres in history. For at least a week, Hulagu gave his men licence to kill, maim, rape and pillage as they saw fit. "They swept through the city," said one account, "like raging wolves attacking sheep, with loose reins and shameless faces, murdering and spreading terror." According to the same source, furniture "made of gold and encrusted with jewels was cut to pieces with knives and torn to shreds. Those hiding behind the veils of the great Harem were dragged through the streets and alleys, each of them becoming a plaything… as the population died at the hands of the invaders."

How many people were slaughtered? Some said 100,000; others said the true total was nearer a million. And al-Musta'sim was among them: according to one version, he was rolled in a carpet and trampled to death.

A fourth-century AD coin of Theodosius I. He and two others issued the Edict of Thessalonica

27 FEBRUARY 380

After years of theological disagreement, the emperors Theodosius I, Gratian and Valentinian II issue the **Edict of Thessalonica**, ordering Roman subjects to worship "the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, in equal majesty and in a holy Trinity" and to reject the ideas of "foolish madmen".



Black smoke chokes the air after Japan's air raid on Darwin, Australia in February 1942. The attack killed at least 236 people and injured hundreds more

19 FEBRUARY 1942

Japan rains fury on Australia

A surprise bombing raid brings death and destruction to Darwin

Few dates are as deeply etched into Australia's imagination as 19 February 1942, which saw the bloodiest attack by a foreign power in the nation's history. In all, 242 Japanese planes swooped down on Darwin, the Northern Territory's capital, in two waves of terrifying intensity. "Men who were there during the raids declared it was worse than anything they had experienced in London," reported *The Sydney Morning Herald* two days later. "It was a blitz of the most ferocious kind."

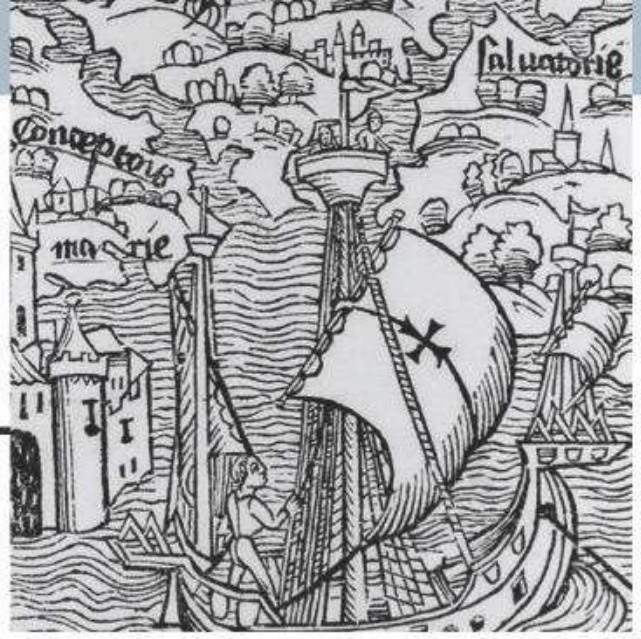
Although Darwin was a key link in the defence of the neighbouring Dutch East Indies, few people seriously expected the Japanese to strike with such deadly speed. Even at 9.58 in the morning, as the first planes appeared overhead, there was no hint of the carnage to come. "There was very little warning of the first raid," admitted *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Yet "within two minutes of the alert, bombs were falling. The bombers came over in seven or eight waves. It was perfect formation-pattern bombing. There were nine machines to a wave, and they came over at intervals of about three minutes."

What followed was bedlam. At least 236 people were killed, and hundreds more were seriously injured. In particular, the Japanese targeted the American and Australian ships in the harbour, killing at least 80 people on USS *Peaty* alone.

Amid the chaos, order came perilously close to breaking down. Convinced they were facing a full invasion, many men abandoned their posts, and there were several reports of looting of "furniture, refrigerators, stoves, pianos, clothes [and] even children's toys".

Yet as clouds of thick black smoke rose above the waterfront, the horror and panic in Darwin did nothing to undermine Australia's commitment to the struggle. Indeed, the shock of the Japanese attack only strengthened many people's resolve to fight back. "Whatever the future holds in store for us," declared Prime Minister John Curtin, "we are Australians and will fight grimly and victoriously… Unity must be our watchword, national service our one desire."

AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL/GETTY IMAGES



The title page of Christopher Columbus' letter in which he first described the New World, published in 1494

15 FEBRUARY 1493

Christopher Columbus writes of the New World

The explorer reveals the dizzying riches of the Americas

The date was 15 February 1493. Sailing back from the Americas, Christopher Columbus decided to write to the finance minister of Aragon, Luis de Santángel, to report his discoveries. He was writing, he said, from "the islands of India beyond the Ganges recently discovered", which did not say much for his command of geography. Even so, he had good news – for the voyage had been a triumph.

After more than 30 days at sea, Columbus had "discovered a great many islands inhabited by numberless people", which he had promptly claimed for the Spanish monarchs, Ferdinand and Isabella. He described the island of Hispaniola as "a marvel. Its hills and mountains, fine plains and open country, are rich and fertile for planting and for pasturage, and for building towns and villages." And inland, he wrote, "there are numerous mines of metals and innumerable people".

One word, above all, came up again and again. "There are many spices and vast mines of gold and other metals in this island," wrote Columbus. There were magnificent rivers, too, "most of which bear gold… To speak, in conclusion, only of what has been done during this hurried voyage, their Highnesses will see that I can give them as much gold as they desire."

Gold! That was what the Spanish authorities most wanted to hear. And with that, history was made. H

Dominic Sandbrook co-presents the weekly podcast *The Rest is History* with historian Tom Holland, available on all platforms

GETTY IMAGES

WHY WE SHOULD REMEMBER...

The **Iranian coup** that launched a doomed dynasty

BY **STEPHANIE CRONIN**

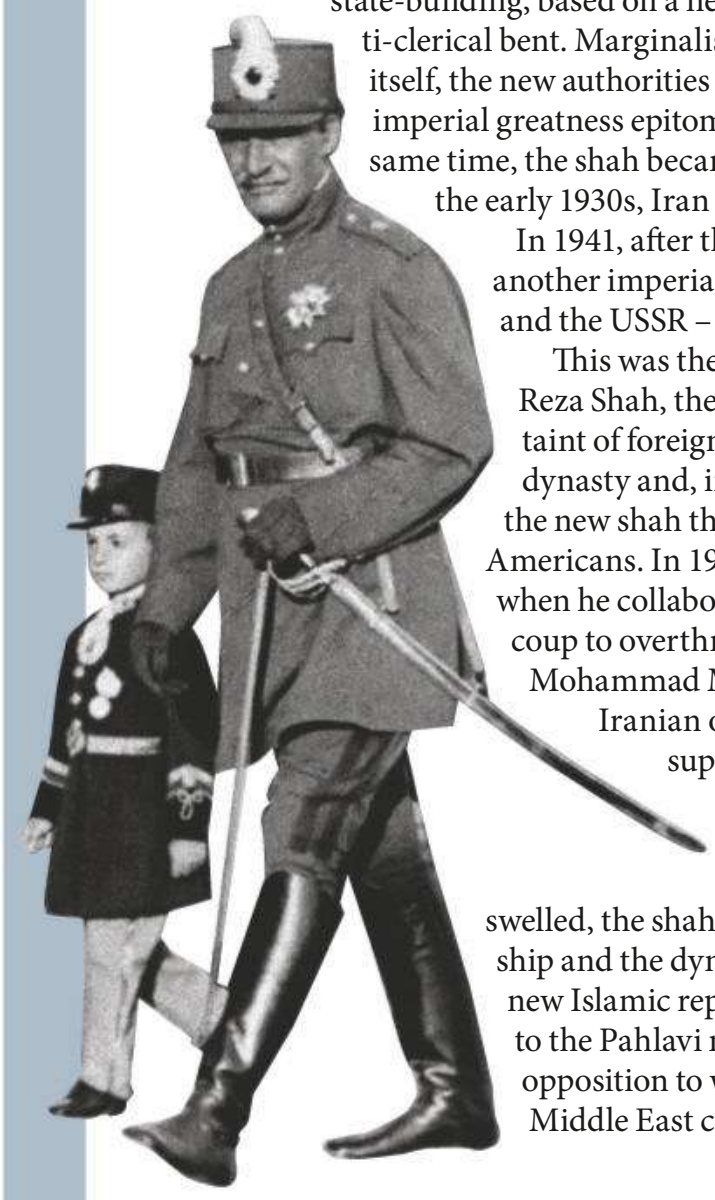
A hundred years ago, on 21 February 1921, a column of ragged troops from what remained of Iran's armed forces marched on the capital, Tehran, and took command of the city. At their head was a then-unknown officer, Reza Khan. This coup had been orchestrated by British representatives in Iran who wished to consolidate their position in the country in the face of the threat from the Bolsheviks, just across Iran's northern border, and the growing importance of Iranian oil. Their choice of Reza Khan as leader was based on their opinion of him as a simple soldier, entirely lacking in political ambitions of his own. In this they were spectacularly mistaken. His rise to power was inexorable. Immediately after the coup he was appointed army commander by the new government, becoming war minister later in the year. In 1923 he made himself prime minister, and in 1925 a pliant constituent assembly deposed the existing shah in his favour. The next year he crowned himself shah, his son Muhammad Reza was named as crown prince, and the new Pahlavi dynasty was established.

"The British were spectacularly mistaken about Reza Khan. His rise to power was inexorable"

The new shah and his supporters began a programme of sometimes brutal state-building, based on a new secular nationalism with an anti-clerical bent. Marginalising both the Muslim clergy and Islam itself, the new authorities harked back to an invented ancient imperial greatness epitomised by the ruins of Persepolis. At the same time, the shah became increasingly authoritarian and, by the early 1930s, Iran was a police state.

In 1941, after the German attack on the Soviet Union, another imperial intervention – this time by Britain and the USSR – forced his abdication.

This was the inheritance of his son, Mohammad Reza Shah, the second and last Pahlavi shah. The taint of foreign patronage had always clung to the dynasty and, in the context of the Cold War, the new shah threw himself into the arms of the Americans. In 1953 he enraged nationalist opinion when he collaborated with Britain and the US in a coup to overthrow the popular prime minister, Mohammad Mossadegh, who had nationalised Iranian oil. A decade later, following the violent suppression of protest, a new opponent, Ayatollah Khomeini, moved into the spotlight. Finally, in January 1979, as the revolutionary movement swelled, the shah fled, the Pahlavi myth of Persian kingship and the dynasty itself vanishing into history. The new Islamic republic still defines itself in opposition to the Pahlavi monarchy, and its staunch opposition to western domination of the Middle East continues today. H



Reza Khan and his son, the crown prince, in 1926. The shah came to power in 1921, but within a few decades his dynasty was in tatters

Stephanie Cronin is the author of *Social Histories of Iran: Modernism and Marginality in the Middle East* (Cambridge University Press, 2021)

LETTERS

A 16th-century portrait of Richard III. The king's reputation may not be wholly salvageable, argues reader Eleanor Levy

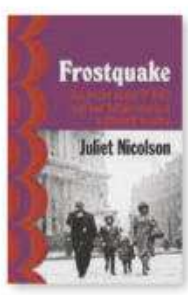
LETTER OF THE MONTH

Love and rockets

I'm looking forward to reading Robert Harris's latest book, *V2*, which was highlighted in your December issue (*Fact to Fiction)*. My late father was a London fireman from 1939 to 1944. He survived the worst of the Blitz and witnessed some horrific catastrophes. In December 1944 he was demobbed from the service. His discharge letter, from the chief of the National Fire Service, thanked him for his service but said he was no longer required as the danger to London was now over and the enemy were facing defeat. Within weeks of returning to civilian life he was one of many victims of one of the first V2 rockets to hit London.

At the same time as the rocket hit Bethnal Green, I was with my mother in a nearby hospital outpatient department. Although the blast was several miles away, the building shook and nearly every window shattered from the blast. When my mother learned where the missile had landed, she attempted to find out whether my dad was okay. We found the area in turmoil and the emergency services attempting to retrieve the dead and possible survivors. It was impossible to get any clue as to his possible fate as the injured were being ferried to hospitals.

Eventually, after many days, we were contacted from a hospital in Hertfordshire to inform us that he was one of its patients. He remained in hospital for several months as he required many skin grafts. The irony was that he had suffered no scratches after nearly five years' service based in an east London fire station.
Melvyn Carlowe, Enfield



We reward the *Letter of the Month* writer with a copy of a new history book. This issue, that is **Frostquake: The Frozen Winter of 1962 and How Britain Emerged a Different Country** by Juliet Nicolson.
You can read our review of the book on page 82

Reassessing Richard

While I found Matthew Lewis's article *Richard the Radical* (Christmas) interesting and informative, I must take issue with its main premise. Richard III might well have been "a people's champion" against traditional and injudicious practices which exploited the poor. However, above all this, he had usurped the throne and diverted its natural course.

In my opinion, no substantial evidence has thus far been discovered concerning the whereabouts of his nephews, the rightful and legal heirs to their father's throne. Only one person stood to gain from their disappearance. For someone concerned, as Lewis argues, with legal niceties, Richard seems to have swept such considerations aside, agreeing to be crowned in their stead. Thus he usurped the throne in an age when regicide was severely frowned upon.

It is remarkable how scant his support was in 1485, when he was battling for his crown and his life. When Richard's body was disinterred, X-rays revealed that his corpse had been stabbed twice after death. I believe that these assaults upon a dead king reflect the low esteem in which he was held.

Revisionism is a necessary part of ongoing historical research, but to be truly valid it must consider all the salient facts.
Eleanor Levy, London

Fixated on the war

Congratulations to Alec Ryrie on his excellent article (*Our Dangerous Devotion to the Second World War*, Christmas). I have long held the view that our fixation on the war has become thoroughly unhealthy and self-regarding, and is hampering our view to the future and national development. It remains hugely important historically, but we must start to see it in perspective.

I believe this is partly due to a curious ongoing failure of the British (especially English) nation to come to terms fully with the loss of empire. At a deep level, many of us still seem prone to suppose the world should look up to us as a special, chosen people.

I am not downplaying the Second World War as a source of lessons, mostly deeply serious. I was born in the second year of the war and I can still remember the bomber fleets passing overhead to flatten German cities. For a short time, I worked at the Imperial War Museum. During my life I have seen the shreds of empire disappear, yet still imperialistic attitudes remain, including the nonsensical cliché that "we won the war"! The war in Europe was, of course, won by the Soviet Union, with the western Allies applying the coup-de-grâce.

Ryrie poses the question of what positive moral compass we can espouse to replace Jesus, and the negative one of Nazism. I don't know. For most of us now, me included, banging the antique drum of religion is pointless. Part of the answer for me is the salvation of the natural world, for which we are now responsible. It is inseparable from the values governing our relationships with each other.
Frank Beasley, Chesterfield

Bible lessons

I disagree with Alex Ryrie's article on the "sacred" Second World War, which implied that Adolf Hitler has replaced Jesus Christ. Throughout history, wars have come and gone but Jesus Christ has survived. Will anyone remember Hitler in 2,000 years' time? I believe good will overcome evil.

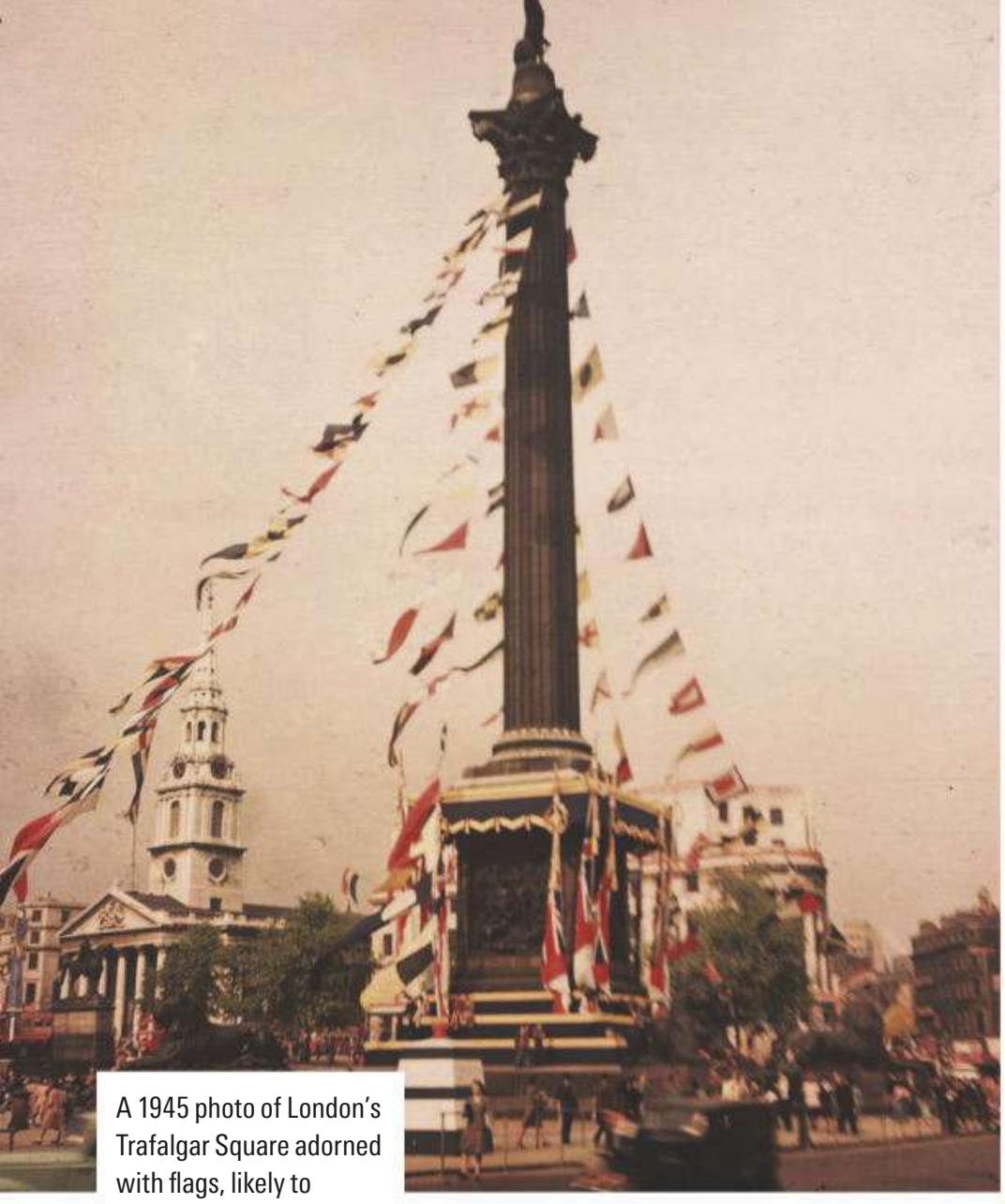
Ryrie asked: "Where are more stable, durable, and nourishing values for our culture going to come from?" I recommend a good book to read: the Bible. Not only does it tell us about the birth of Christianity through Jesus Christ, but also that one day Jesus Christ will return to this Earth and set up a kingdom that will take away all evil.
Alan McGaw, Manchester

Temperance and permanence

I read David Olusoga's article on Victorian temperance (*Hidden Histories*, Christmas) with interest since I live only a few miles from Fitzpatrick's in Rawtenstall. However, I think it is inaccurate to describe this as Britain's only surviving temperance bar. I would refer you to the Cross Keys Temperance Inn in Sedbergh at the foot of Cautley Spout, England's highest waterfall. It is 400 years old and owned by the National Trust.
Julie Noble, Burnley

The Cross Keys Inn in Cumbria, which, reader Julie Noble notes, still survives from the temperance era

ALAMY



A 1945 photo of London's Trafalgar Square adorned with flags, likely to acknowledge the role of different nations in the Allies' victory. Alec Ryrie's essay on the continuing importance of the Second World War to the British psyche attracted much reader comment

GETTY IMAGES

Smell you later

I was intrigued to read the news story about historical smells (January). I remember visiting Jorvik Viking Centre with my children years ago when they had recreated "authentic" Viking aromas. My daughter was intrigued and bought a smelly postcard. Years later she still had it and it still smelt! I would be interested to smell historical food – but probably not much else.
Penny Fisher, Wilmslow

Corrections

- As reader David Strong has pointed out, there was an error in the picture caption on page 80 of the December issue (*Books*). We described the image as being an incident from the Anglo-Burmese War of 1824–26, whereas in fact it was the 1846 battle of Aliwal from the First Anglo-Sikh War.

- Many readers have written-in regarding the image of Stonehenge on page 7 of the January issue (*News*). The text implied that the road shown was the A303 but in fact the picture we published was an older one that included the A344, which was closed in 2013. Apologies for the error.

WRITE TO US

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Standing proud

The ruins of the once magnificent Roche Abbey in the South Yorkshire countryside. Roche's fate at the hands of Henry VIII's agents inspired one of the most influential – and perhaps misleading – contemporary accounts of the Dissolution

The Smash and Grab Delusion

The dissolution of the monasteries has long been cast as an orgy of mindless violence unleashed by a hot-headed Henry VIII. Yet this was a precision-planned operation, writes **Hugh Willmott**, and wanton destruction wasn't its primary aim

"The dissolution of the monasteries was the greatest single act of vandalism in English, and perhaps European history," undertaken by "a grasping and tyrannical king, and effected through… ruthless, cynical and philistine men." So wrote the architectural historian Sir Howard Colvin in an essay on the topic in 1999.

This view of the Dissolution as a callous "smash and grab" – one that resulted in the wanton destruction of the nation's medieval heritage – has permeated both the academic literature and popular imagination since the event itself, despite Hilary Mantel's heroic attempt to humanise Thomas Cromwell. But is that all there is to the story of what is indisputably one of the most significant events of the 16th century?

Carried out between 1536 and 1541, the dissolution of the monasteries saw agents of King Henry VIII and his chief minister, Thomas Cromwell, shutting down more than 800 of England's religious houses and confiscating their possessions. Given that it was enacted in the wake of Henry's break with the Catholic church of Rome – and his prosecution of a series of costly wars – the king's targeting of the monasteries has widely been characterised as a bold and brutal bid to cement his religious supremacy, and to divert the church's vast wealth into his coffers.

Our view of these events is inevitably influenced by surviving contemporary, or near-contemporary, accounts. And no account was more influential than Michael Sherbrook's *Falle of the Religiouse Howses*. While the beneficiaries of the closure of the monasteries remained largely silent, those, like Sherbrook, who felt aggrieved were most

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certainly not – and they wasted little time in describing the Dissolution as an act of mindless vandalism.

The destruction of Roche Abbey in Yorkshire "would have pitied any heart to see", observed Sherbrook, "for it would have made an heart of flint to have melted and weeped to have seen the breaking up of the house… and the sudden spoil that fell the same day." When the events of the 1530s are described as an ugly stain on English history, Sherbrook's book is at least partly responsible. Yet take a closer look at the man and his writings, and all is not what it seems.

Despite being described by many as "an eyewitness account", the *Falle* is nothing of the sort; in June 1538, when Roche was suppressed, Sherbrook was no more than four years of age. Instead, we must look to the motivation behind Sherbrook's words, written three decades after the event. Although he was an Anglican priest in adulthood, Sherbrook retained a devotion towards the old (Catholic) religion and the monastic way of life. In particular, he was a fierce critic of John Foxe, whose famous work of Protestant history and martyrology, *Actes and Monuments*, was published in English for the first time in 1563, shortly before Sherbrook started to compile the *Falle*. Sherbrook's account must therefore be seen not as a measured piece of reportage but as a critique of the growing Puritan movement.

The *Falle* is far from entirely fictitious – it drew upon the testimonials of witnesses, which according to Sherbrook included his own uncle and father. However, read it in a more nuanced way, and a picture of meticulous planning, rather than random destruction, emerges. What can be seen is a highly organised pattern of dismantling, sale and dispersal – one that followed Cromwell's exacting instructions and was replicated at monasteries across the country. The monks were allowed to take their cells' contents with them, servants were paid off, and timbers from the church were purchased (not stolen) by the local gentry and yeomen.

Genuine accounts of the looting of monasteries are rare and largely confined to petty theft

At one point in the *Falle*, Sherbrook laments that pewter vessels had been "conveyed away" and hidden in cliffs around the abbey "so that it seemeth every person bent himself to filch and spoil". Yet, in all probability, these pewters were deliberately concealed by the residents of the abbey rather than the victims of looting.

In fact, it seems likely that most of the house's possessions were carefully looked after in anticipation of a future sale. Four years after the closure of Roche, Ecclesfield church purchased some of the former abbey's vestments, which had clearly been well maintained in the intervening period. And Sherbrook's own assertion that "bells I did see hang in there myself [the abbey steeple], more than a year after the suppression" suggests that these had been left untouched, despite being one of the more valuable portable assets.

Genuine historical accounts of looting are rare and largely confined to opportunistic petty theft, particularly when the monastic house was located in an urban centre. Letters from Thomas Cromwell's commissioners mention such incidents at Reading Greyfriars and Bridlington Priory (in Yorkshire's East Riding). We know that a tinker was hanged after being caught stealing lead from Pipewell Abbey in Northamptonshire. But, in the majority of cases, precautions were apparently successful in preventing such criminal acts.

Perhaps the best documented example of widespread theft took place at Hailes Abbey in the Cotswolds, where the entire population – from the gentry to yeoman farmers – were implicated in the building's looting. Yet, as the American historian Ethan Shagan has pointed out, there was a particular reason for this outbreak of lawbreaking: the debunking of Hailes' most venerated relic, the Blood of Christ. When the community discovered that the relic was nothing more than beeswax coloured with saffron, they vented their anger on the monastery that had deceived them.

A change of scene

So if the Dissolution wasn't merely a chaotic "scramble for spoils" led by a tyrannical king – as is so often portrayed in traditional accounts – what was it? While it undeniably had a devastating impact upon those in religious orders, and enriched many others, it was a far more complex series of events, which developed out of a rapidly changing political and religious scene. The historian George Bernard has argued that the events of the 1530s should be seen in the broader context of Henry VIII's genuine desire for wider ecclesiastical reform as well as his efforts to tighten control over the church. At this point, at least, it was never intended that all the monasteries be closed.

ALAMY/NATIONAL ARCHIVES

TIMELINE The fall of the monasteries

1524–29
Cardinal Wolsey suppresses 29 small monasteries with papal blessing in order to use their revenues to found two colleges at Oxford and Ipswich. This so-called **"Little Dissolution"** sets an unintended precedent for the later Dissolution.

1534
The First Fruits and Tenths Act diverts the 10 per cent annual tax on clerical incomes from the papacy to the crown.

November 1534
The Act of Supremacy sees Henry VIII declared as the supreme head of the Church of England.

January–May 1535
Valor Ecclesiasticus, a valuation of all church and monastic revenues, is compiled and **reveals the full scale of the wealth** of the monasteries.

January 1535
Thomas Cromwell's commissioners begin to examine and report upon the state of the monasteries in England and Wales.

Cardinal Wolsey's "Little Dissolution" foreshadowed the events of the 1530s

A detail of the title page of the crown's valuation of the monasteries' wealth

Thomas Cromwell, Henry VIII's chief minister, was the architect of the Dissolution of the late 1530s

Method to the madness?
Henry VIII meets Robert Sherborn, bishop of Chichester, in 1526. It's been argued that the Dissolution was not just a power grab, but a genuine attempt at ecclesiastical reform

The origins of the Dissolution lay in Henry VIII's split with Rome and the passing of the First Fruits and Tenths Act in 1534, when a 10 per cent tax on all church assets that had formerly gone to the pope passed to the king. The act led to the compilation of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* the following year, which assessed all religious institutions' wealth, including the monasteries. It was only at this point that the decision was made to close some of the less wealthy monasteries, followed by a second round of visitations to report on how well each house was run.

Whether this was an exercise in smearing the monasteries' reputation and justifying their closure has been hotly debated. Crown commissioners often painted a bleak picture, but they did also report that many houses were well run. And it's worth noting that these visitations weren't uniquely scathing: those undertaken by diocesan bishops in earlier decades could also be damning in their criticism.

The first parliamentary act resulting from these visitations was passed in February 1536, and it allowed for the forced suppression of houses with incomes of less than £200. Despite 419 institutions falling below this threshold, only 243 were closed at this point, and the act made provision for all those who wished to remain in orders to be transferred to an alternative house. This provision perhaps most clearly demonstrates that a master plan to close all the monasteries was not yet in place.

What transformed the situation was a series of popular revolts in late 1536 and early 1537 – the so-called Pilgrimage of Grace in Yorkshire and the Lincolnshire Rising – which were triggered, in part, by opposition to the initial monastic suppressions. Once these revolts had been put down, there seems to have been a rapid change in government policy. First, houses that had participated in the risings were suppressed. However, these were quickly followed by those that had no involvement in the unrest.

A second act was finally passed in 1539, making it legal for abbots from the larger monasteries to surrender their houses. Though it did not compel them to do so, most monasteries had already been coerced into surrender before the act had even passed into law. Waltham Abbey was the last to be suppressed, on 23 March 1540.

Contrary to Michael Sherbrook's description of a chaotic free-for-all, what followed the closure of a monastery was a highly controlled and regulated process. The monks were released from their vows, and if the monastery had not resisted surrender, the crown gave them pensions for life dependent on the house's wealth and their former religious status.

On the monks' eviction, the monastery reverted to the crown, and some of its contents were removed immediately. Any precious metals and money recovered was sent to the Tower: Sir John Williams, the master of the jewels, recorded that between 1538 and 1540 the equivalent of 412kg of gold, 7,800kg of silver and £79,081 16s 4½d in coin entered the king's purse.

Local sales were often then organised to disperse the lesser goods and chattels of the house. These were usually purchased by private individuals, local churches, and even the former inhabitants of the monasteries

BRIDGEMAN/ALAMY

February 1536
The Act for the Dissolution of the Lesser Monasteries makes legal the enforced closure of any religious house with an income of less than £200 per annum. The first suppressions start immediately afterwards.

October 1536–37
Two popular uprisings – **the Lincolnshire Rising and Pilgrimage of Grace** – apparently inspire the final decision to suppress all the remaining monastic houses.

1537–38
Increasing pressure is put on the remaining monasteries to **surrender to the king** irrespective of their income. Increasing numbers comply.

April 1539
The Act for the Dissolution of the Greater Monasteries retrospectively makes legal all past and future "voluntary" surrenders of monastic houses.

23 March 1540
Waltham Abbey in Essex is closed. It is the last of 800 religious houses to be suppressed in just over four years.

A 19th-century depiction of the Pilgrimage of Grace, which had grave consequences for England's monasteries

A c1840 painting of Waltham Abbey, the last of England's religious houses to be suppressed

Pipework and lead from the roof were reserved for the king, stripped on site and melted down

themselves. At Monk Bretton Priory, a former inmate acquired a significant proportion of the house's monastic books, while John Leland, acting on behalf of the king, scoured many of the monastic libraries for items to add to the royal collection. Despite John Bale's fanciful suggestion in 1549 that local people used monastic texts "to serve theyr jakes" ("use as bog roll"), however uncomfortable such a repurposing might have been, any goods that held commercial value would likely have been sold to maximise profit.

Stripped on site

Certain building materials of value, most notably the lead from the roofs and pipework, were reserved for the king, stripped on site and melted down into ingots before being removed. This process was thoroughly documented and could generate significant sums. At Jervaulx Abbey in Yorkshire, agents of the king removed 399½ fothers of lead (roughly the equivalent of 400 tonnes) and valued them at £1,000. Remains of lead ingots have been recovered during excavations on several sites, most notably Rievaulx (North York Moors) but also the monasteries at Kenilworth, Ixworth (Suffolk) and Haverfordwest. Furnaces constructed to melt these vast quantities of lead have also been found in the cloister ranges at several monasteries, most notably in the church at Langley Abbey in Norfolk, where it was located at the site of the high altar itself.

Once these materials had been removed, most monasteries remained, at least initially, unmolested. But the stripping of lead roofs would have rendered most principal buildings unusable in the short term, and the buildings still represented a tangible asset for the crown. This value was articulated in a letter to Thomas Cromwell, written in 1538 by a king's agent called Dr London, describing the recent closure of Reading Friary. Dr London had "defaced the church, the windows being full of friars, and left the roof and walls whole to the king's use".

Under Cromwell's oversight, it appears

Rising from the ruins

The Dissolution didn't spell the end of the story for England's monasteries, as the following five examples prove

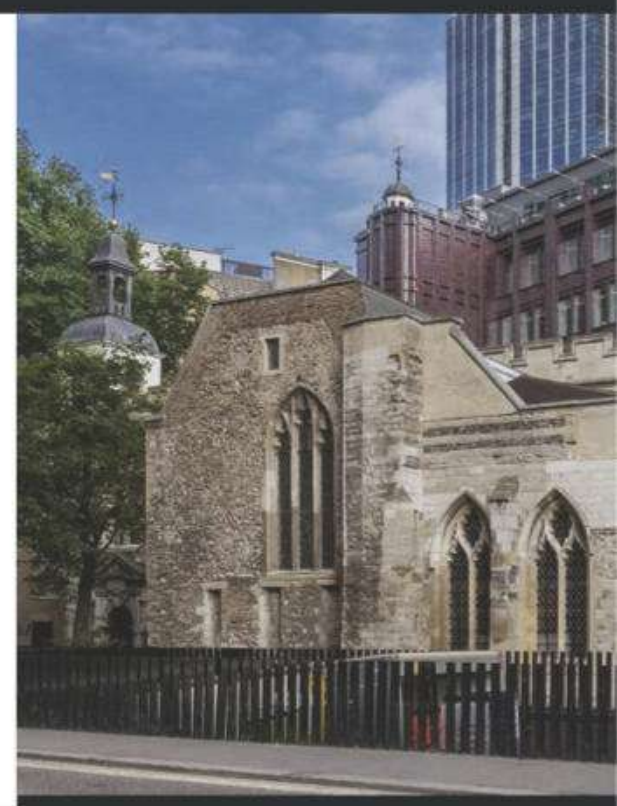
1 The gentry move in

Thornton Abbey in Lincolnshire was the site of one of the largest and wealthiest Augustinian houses in England. Following the Dissolution, it was repurposed as a college to train secular canons. On the death of Henry VIII, this too was suppressed, and portions of the precinct and cloister were converted into a mansion and gardens by Henry Holbeach, bishop of Lincoln. Various gentry families subsequently occupied the site until it was largely abandoned in the 17th century. Today the impressive medieval gatehouse and abbey ruins are in the care of English Heritage, surrounded by the extensive earthwork remains of the post-suppression gardens.

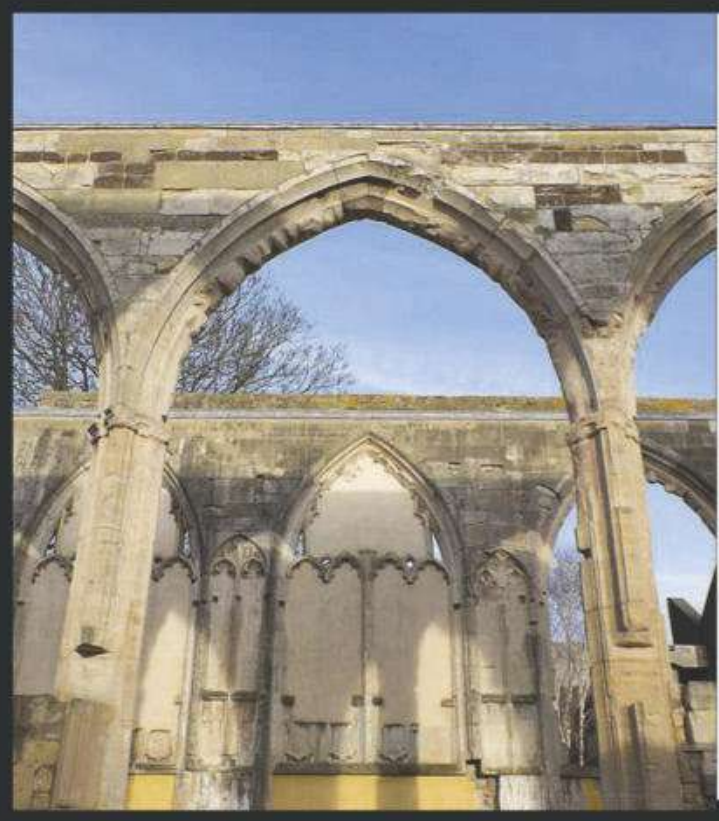
2 A capital survivor

St Helen's Bishopgate in London was a modest Benedictine nunnery prior to the Dissolution, with the local parish holding rights to worship in the church's central nave, and the nuns using the northern choir. Following the Dissolution and the cloister's demolition, the church's nave was granted to the parish. However, the Leathersellers' Company purchased the nuns' choir and presented it to the parish, thus preserving the whole monastic church in a complete state. Today, St Helen's still survives largely unaltered as the centre of parochial worship.

St Helen's Bishopgate owes its survival in the City of London to the Leathersellers' Company, which purchased it and presented it to the parish



Since its suppression, Gloucester's Franciscan friary has housed a horse mill and beer vats



3 From house of God to beer factory

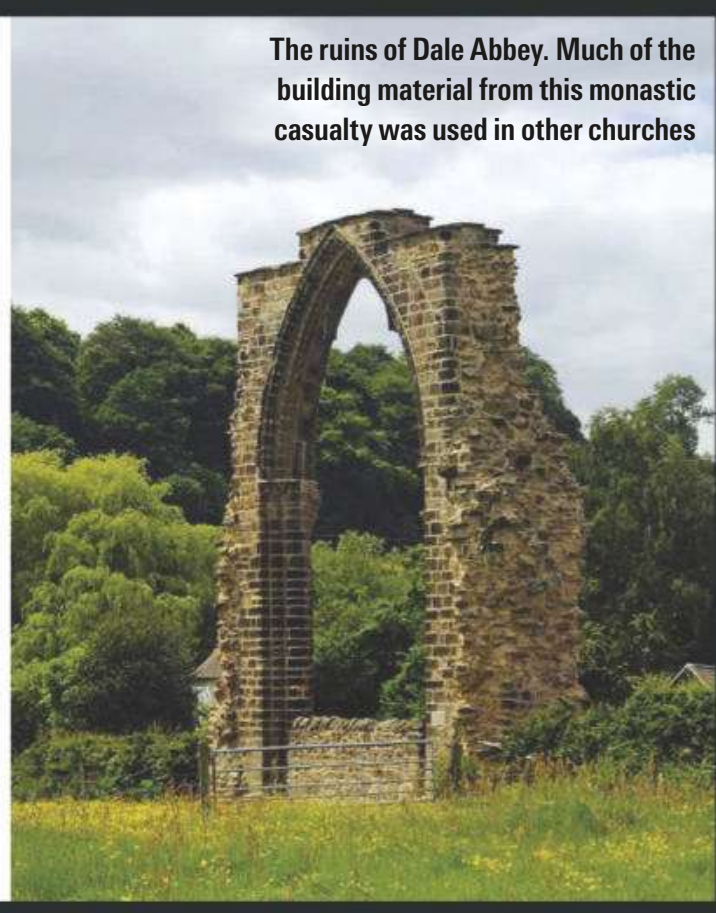
In 1544, John Jennings acquired the church of the former **Franciscan friary in Gloucester**. Shortly after, the church was sold to Thomas Payne, who converted the nave and north aisle into a brewery. This became a major supplier of beer to the town (with its own dedicated water supply piped from nearby Robinswood Hill) until the middle of the 18th century. Excavations have since revealed evidence for vats and a horse mill on the site of the former church. Today, the church walls still survive in places to the height of the roof, making it an imposing ruin.

The remains of Thornton Abbey's octagonal chapterhouse, which is now in the care of English Heritage

4 Rubble redeployed

Following the closure of **Dale Abbey in Derbyshire** in 1538, a significant proportion of its goods, and building materials from the cloister, were sold to Sir Francis Pole for £77 12s 2d. Pole put this to use in the now-demolished Radbourne Hall and nearby St Andrew's Church. Some of Pole's acquisitions were also employed by Sir Henry Sacheverell in the refurbishment of St Matthew's Church at Morley. Today only the east wall of the monastic church at Dale survives – along with the cloister and chapterhouse's footprint. But many of the elements that Pole removed – including window panels, floor tiles and a reused sepulchre slab – can still be seen in Morley church.

The ruins of Dale Abbey. Much of the building material from this monastic casualty was used in other churches



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Over the past 500 years, Newcastle's Dominican friary has played host to guilds, crafts shops and a restaurant

5 Decay and renovation

Following its closure, the whole of the former **Dominican friary in Newcastle** was bought by the city authorities to provide for the city's expanding guilds. The friary church was demolished, but the cloister was retained and subdivided to provide accommodation for nine separate companies, who were also apportioned a share of the wider precinct. Although Newcastle Blackfriars was latterly allowed to fall into decay, the buildings were renovated in the 1970s and 80s and continue to serve the town by housing small craft shops and a restaurant.

In the following decades, monasteries were converted into schools, hospitals, guild halls and even prisons

Grim appraisal
A survey of all "lorshippis, manners, landes" belonging to the Benedictine monastery of Colchester, following its dissolution in 1539. The abbot of Colchester was executed for challenging the suppression of the monastery

that, at first, it was the government's intention that the crown would retain the vast majority of monastic land and lease it to provide a perpetual income for the king. Indeed, few outright grants of land were made before 1540, and it wasn't until the last five years of Henry's reign that sales increased rapidly (by the king's death in early 1547, around half had already been sold).

What is now clear is that there was no great "giveaway" of this newfound wealth by the king to his cronies. Statements from early historians such as Gustave Constant, who mused that monastic land was squandered "as stakes in a game of dice", can be shown to be wholly untrue. Several decades of detailed regional surveys examining what happened to monastic land around the country have consistently shown that property and holdings were usually sold at a fixed regulated rate of 20 times their annual income, although this was significantly lower in urban areas.

The time that elapsed between the closure of a monastery and its eventual resale could be quite considerable, and in the meantime they appear to have remained intact, if derelict. Excavations at several sites, such as Chelmsford Priory and the Dominican friary in Oxford, showed that considerable depths of debris built up within the now-vacant buildings, and even young saplings were able to take hold. At Coventry, the priory church remained abandoned for some years, only used as a waste dump by a nearby slaughterhouse. For a time, its only residents were a pack of unfortunate feral dogs who were crushed to death when a section of the decayed nave vault fell suddenly upon them.

New leases of life

Perhaps the most under-appreciated aspect of the Dissolution is what happened to the churches, cloisters and precincts once they had entered into new ownership. Despite popular misconceptions, few disappeared entirely in the 16th century; they often evolved into new roles and functions.

Examples of the complete destruction of monastic complexes at this time are rare, although one exception was Lewes Priory in East Sussex, a site that Cromwell himself acquired. The king's chief minister had to employ a military engineer called Giovanni Portinari and a considerable quantity of gunpowder to raze the priory – a level of resource that few others would have had at their disposal. Indeed, less professional attempts to destroy monastic buildings resulted in disaster. Excavations at both Stanley and Rievaulx abbeys revealed the skeletal remains of workers crushed by masonry falls during unsuccessful attempts to undermine the monastery walls. In both these cases, the demolition operations seem to have been abandoned shortly after.

Instead, new owners often sought to adapt, and thus unwittingly preserve, the medieval buildings. We've long known about the conversion of monastic cloisters and even churches into high-status mansions – Sir William Paulet's transformation of Netley Abbey near Southampton into a residence resulted in the near-complete survival of the entire Cistercian plan, which remains an impressive ruin today. But what is becoming more apparent are the large numbers of smaller-scale domestic conversions that utilised a single element of the former cloister complex, providing opportunities for those of more modest means to create cost-effective dwellings. Many urban houses were acquired and put to more general civic use. In the decades following the Dissolution, buildings were converted into schools, hospitals, guild halls and even prisons.

Perhaps what is less appreciated today is the extent to which religious life continued in the suppressed monasteries. Six former abbey complexes were retained to serve the new dioceses created for the reordered English church. What's more, up to 250 parishes had long-established rights to worship within their local monastic churches – and they continued to be respected even after the Dissolution. Portions of monastic churches, and sometimes the whole building, were given over to parochial use, and many are still retained for this purpose today.

The Dissolution was an undeniably destructive act, but 480 years later, the monastic world's legacy still surrounds us and was never completely extinguished. H

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LISTEN

To listen to Melvyn Bragg and guests discuss the dissolution of the monasteries on BBC Radio 4's **In Our Time**, go to *bbc.co.uk/programmes/b009jtq1*

From mustard gas to medical breakthroughs: the surprising history of chemotherapy

Chemotherapy may be one of the cornerstones of modern cancer treatment, but its development was anything but conventional – and Cancer Research UK (CRUK) played a key role.

Although the term was first coined in the early 1900s to describe the use of drugs to combat infectious diseases, the roots of chemotherapy as we know it today are actually intertwined with the history of warfare. In 1942, while investigating new types of mustard gas, American pharmacologists Alfred Gilman and Louis Goodman noted that exposure to the chemicals caused white blood cell counts to decrease.

Convinced that such agents could be used to kill cancerous blood cells too, the duo enlisted a surgeon to administer a nitrogen mustard compound to a patient with non-Hodgkin lymphoma. The results were striking, and when the research was published shortly after the Second World War, it created a medical sensation. Soon, nitrogen mustards were being widely used as a form of lymphoma treatment.

Meanwhile, Cancer Research UK's own scientists were involved in developing the first platinum-based drug – cisplatin. Sir Alexander Haddow, a scientist at an institute funded by one of Cancer Research UK's founding charities, heard about a study by US-based researchers Barnett Rosenberg and Loretta Von Camp that revealed that platinum electrodes could affect the growth rate of bacteria. He charged young pharmacologist Dr Tom Connors with discovering which platinum-containing chemical would work best in a drug to treat patients with cancer. Their efforts paid off and they eventually identified a suitable compound– and, by 1971, it was ready to go into clinical trials. Since then, death rates from the disease have fallen by around 80 per cent in the UK. And today, 50 per cent of people in England and Wales survive cancer for ten or more years.

A lasting commitment

Gifts in Wills fund more than a third of Cancer Research UK's research. They help ensure that it can remain committed to funding research that improves treatments such as chemotherapy – creating better, kinder treatments for people affected by cancer. The charity also supports clinical trials, and its researchers will do all they can to continue to make the breakthroughs that will one day beat cancer. One in two people in the UK born after 1960 will get cancer in their lifetimes, so it is absolutely vital that the researchers at Cancer Research UK continue their life-saving work.

But over the past year, COVID-19 has hit Cancer Research UK hard. Fundraising has fallen, putting future research at risk. Just as its researchers pledge to do all they can to beat cancer, the charity is asking its supporters to pledge to leave a gift in their Will to Cancer Research UK. Gifts in Wills are vital in helping to secure future income for the charity and ensuring that research can continue to save lives for generations to come.

Together, with your pledge and that of Cancer Research UK, we will bring forward the day when all cancers are cured.

CANCER RESEARCH UK

Together we will beat cancer

Registered with FUNDRAISING REGULATOR

To find out more, request a free Gifts in Wills Guide.
Visit cruk.org/willsguide or call 0800 077 6644

Cancer Research UK is a registered charity in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666), and the Isle of Man (1103) and Jersey (247).

The forged texts of the Middle Ages

Forgery was rife in the medieval era, with some of Europe's leading holy men cooking up reams of counterfeit documents. **Levi Roach** examines the fabricated texts of one Bavarian bishop to pick apart why the practice was so popular

The desire to deceive – and be deceived – is universal, and the forging of documents as old as writing itself. In ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, local priests – the experts in literacy – forged inscriptions in the names of earlier pharaohs and kings, claiming rights of preferential treatment. And scarcely a society can be found since in which such skulduggery was not practised in some form or another.

But few regions in world history can rival medieval Europe for the sheer scale of forging. As modern scholars have established, over half of the surviving texts in the names of the Merovingian rulers of early medieval France and Germany (c481–752) are fakes; a third of those in the names of the Lombard rulers of northern Italy (568–774) are suspect; and similar figures hold true of the nearly 2,000 documents of pre-Conquest England. The vast majority of these texts were forged in the Middle Ages, in most cases between the 10th and 13th centuries. Those responsible were not a small cadre of recalcitrant rogues, but leading figures within the church – men such as Bishop Thietmar of Merseburg and Gilbert Foliot, abbot of Gloucester and later bishop of Hereford.

The prevalence of forgery in the Middle Ages poses something of a paradox. How was an age of faith also an age of falsification? Were those responsible simply cynics and hypocrites – or is there more than meets the eye? In an age of fake news and political spin, we are perhaps better placed to resolve these tensions than earlier generations of historians were.

The solution to these problems lies in part in the deep faith of the era. In the Middle Ages, history was a moral exercise. The true past was that which accorded with divine will, not necessarily that attested by earlier documents. The most famous forgery of the Middle Ages, the Donation of Constantine, is a case in point. Although

Master of fakery
The Merseburg Sacramentary, partially written by Bishop Thietmar. He – and many other men of the church, including Bishop Pilgrim of Passau in Bavaria – fabricated texts during the Middle Ages

ALAMY

produced in eighth-century Rome, this supposedly records the donations of the fourth-century Roman emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester I. While the historical Constantine had made no such grant, it was believed that he had, and the Donation largely put flesh on the bones of popular myth. As this case reveals, the temptation to forge was heightened by the fragmentary nature of medieval records. Not even the papacy could boast a complete run of documents back to Constantine's day; elsewhere, the situation was considerably worse. Under these circumstances, the temptation to fill in the gaps – to produce what might or ought to have been – was too great to resist.

Forging was thus the white lie of the Middle Ages, an act of deceit in the cause of

a greater good. It was faith, not cynicism, that inspired the era's counterfeiters. Yet even within the Middle Ages, not all periods were equally marked by forgery. Before the 10th century, it was relatively rare; by the 12th, it was rife. An important moment of transition here is represented by the later 10th century. This is when forging can first be identified across the core regions of western Europe (thereafter, we can trace a steady crescendo across the 11th and 12th centuries). This newfound fascination with forgery was driven by new attitudes to local and institutional memory. It was in the later 10th century that many abbeys and bishoprics first started writing down their own histories, often embellishing them with forgery.

Inventing glory

A good example of these processes at work is offered by Pilgrim, bishop of Passau in south-eastern Bavaria between 971 and 991. Pilgrim hailed from one of the foremost Bavarian noble families, and his uncle, Archbishop Frederick of Salzburg, was his immediate superior within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Pilgrim had been educated at Niederaltaich, a leading local monastery, just upriver from Passau on the Danube. He had probably also spent time studying at Salzburg under his uncle.

In his student days, Pilgrim had read widely about the history of the region. Now that he was bishop, he naturally began inquiring into the history of his see (seat of authority). But where he'd hoped to find evidence of a great and exalted past, he discovered little more than scraps: a brace of privileges in the names of earlier monarchs; a few transaction notices; and a copy of the *Life* of the fifth-century saint Severin. But just when Pilgrim was about to abandon hope, his attention was drawn to a fleeting reference in the latter work to a bishop (or rather, pontiff) of Lorch called Constantius.

Lorch, in modern Upper Austria, lay within Pilgrim's diocese. And the *Life* of

Forging was an act of deceit for the greater good. It was faith, not cynicism, that inspired the era's counterfeiters

TELLTALE ERRORS

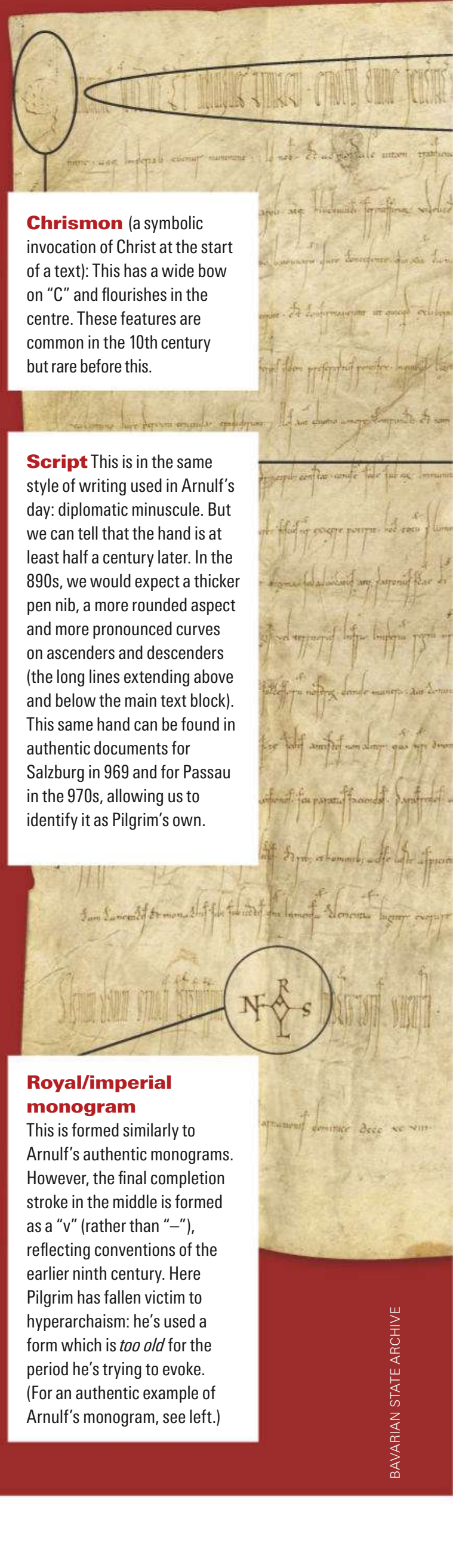
In the medieval period many people fell for forgeries – but Pilgrim of Passau made some crucial mistakes

Bishop Pilgrim was determined to provide a distinguished history for his diocese, Passau, and, like many other holy men of the time, he turned to forgery. Between AD 971 and 991, he fabricated a number of documents, from papal privileges to charters in the name of past kings and queens. These were intended to strengthen his assertion that his lowly diocese had once been home to a grand archbishopric, and that Passau was the lineal descendent of this archbishopric. **(See page 32 for more details.)**

But, given the extravagant nature of Pilgrim's claims – and those of many other medieval forgers – it's often wondered if anyone took them seriously. Was this not some sort of elaborate parlour trick?

The existence of so many forgeries suggests otherwise. It is hardly credible that Pilgrim would have invested so much time and effort producing texts from which he derived no benefit. Why put words in the mouth of Arnulf of Carinthia, the ruler of Germany in the late ninth century, if they carried no greater weight? Why forge texts in the name of the eighth-century Frankish emperor Charlemagne, if no one thought them his? The answer is obvious: they did.

Similarly telling are the efforts Pilgrim took to make his products look the part. He closely modelled his counterfeits on authentic earlier documents, evidently in an attempt to deceive. But despite his diligence, his forgeries reveal many subtle slips. On the right, Levi Roach analyses Pilgrim's counterfeit privilege from emperor Arnulf of Carinthia of 898 to reveal the key areas where the forger fell short.

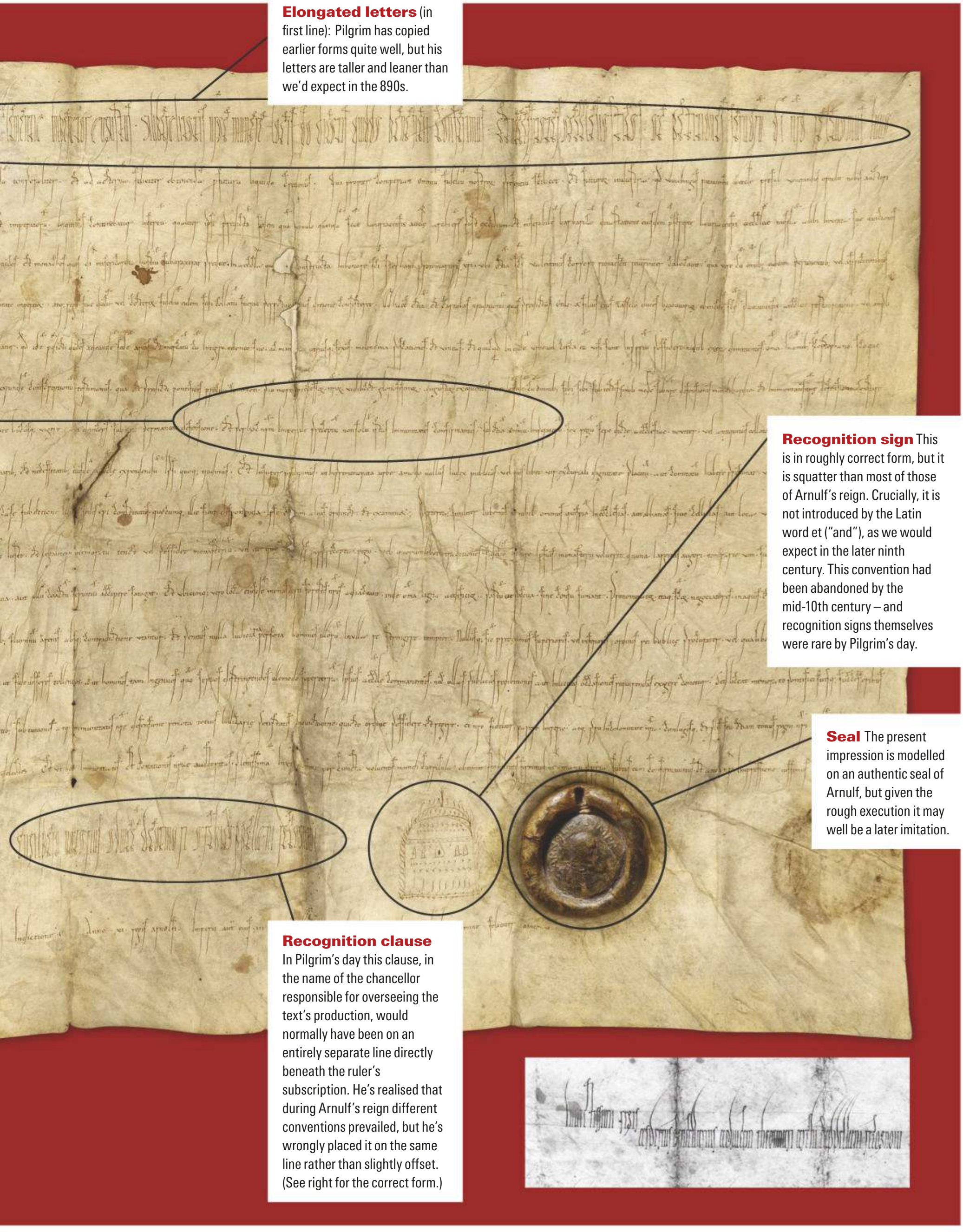


Chrismon (a symbolic invocation of Christ at the start of a text): This has a wide bow on "C" and flourishes in the centre. These features are common in the 10th century but rare before this.

Script This is in the same style of writing used in Arnulf's day: diplomatic minuscule. But we can tell that the hand is at least half a century later. In the 890s, we would expect a thicker pen nib, a more rounded aspect and more pronounced curves on ascenders and descenders (the long lines extending above and below the main text block). This same hand can be found in authentic documents for Salzburg in 969 and for Passau in the 970s, allowing us to identify it as Pilgrim's own.

Royal/imperial monogram
This is formed similarly to Arnulf's authentic monograms. However, the final completion stroke in the middle is formed as a "v" (rather than "–"), reflecting conventions of the earlier ninth century. Here Pilgrim has fallen victim to hyperarchaism: he's used a form which is *too old* for the period he's trying to evoke. (For an authentic example of Arnulf's monogram, see left.)

BAVARIAN STATE ARCHIVE



Elongated letters (in first line): Pilgrim has copied earlier forms quite well, but his letters are taller and leaner than we'd expect in the 890s.

Recognition sign This is in roughly correct form, but it is squatter than most of those of Arnulf's reign. Crucially, it is not introduced by the Latin word et ("and"), as we would expect in the later ninth century. This convention had been abandoned by the mid-10th century – and recognition signs themselves were rare by Pilgrim's day.

Seal The present impression is modelled on an authentic seal of Arnulf, but given the rough execution it may well be a later imitation.

Recognition clause
In Pilgrim's day this clause, in the name of the chancellor responsible for overseeing the text's production, would normally have been on an entirely separate line directly beneath the ruler's subscription. He's realised that during Arnulf's reign different conventions prevailed, but he's wrongly placed it on the same line rather than slightly offset. (See right for the correct form.)

Notorious forger This image from the *Nibelungenlied* manuscript shows Pilgrim welcoming Kriemhild, a fictional character described as his niece in the text. Pilgrim faked documents to give Passau a glorious history

Severin suggested that there had been a bishopric here in the fifth century, long before the foundation of Passau or Salzburg. That Lorch had been an important centre was borne out by physical remains of settlement, including antique walls and church buildings – remains Pilgrim knew first hand. Most tantalising of all, the Latin term used to designate this Constantius, *pontifex* (pontiff), was an ambiguous one, equally applicable to a bishop, an archbishop or even a pope. In Pilgrim's eyes, Constantius soon became not a lowly bishop, but an archbishop charged with oversight of all Noricum (as the region was then known). Moreover, Pilgrim became convinced that Passau was the lineal descendent of this earlier archbishopric of Lorch – and thus rightfully an archbishopric of its own.

An aside in a saint's *Life* and a few physical remains may seem a rather slender basis on which to build such wide-ranging speculation. But this was all that Pilgrim had. And it was, in any case, hardly less plausible than most other versions of local history. Yet if Pilgrim's claims were going to be taken seriously, he would certainly need more to show for himself than ancient rubble and learned speculation.

It was in this context that Pilgrim set to work on one of the most imaginative and elaborate forgery complexes of Austrian and Bavarian history. At its heart lies a set of false papal privileges (or bulls, as documents carrying the papal seal are known), granting and confirming archiepiscopal rights to Lorch from the fifth century onwards. The central claim is that Lorch had been an archbishopric, but that this status was lost – stolen by neighbouring Salzburg – when the see was forced to relocate up the Danube river to Passau, on account of political instability. The hope was evidently to have Passau restored to its "rightful" position.

It simply wouldn't do to have Passau's past shrouded in mystery. It had to be revealed; or if not, it would have to be invented

Alongside the bulls, Pilgrim also forged a number of documents in the names of earlier monarchs. Most of these concern local lands and ecclesiastical rights. But one, in the name of the late ninth-century emperor Arnulf of Carinthia, speaks of how an earlier archbishop of Lorch had been forced to relocate to Passau, losing this status in the process – precisely the scenario envisaged by the bulls. Fortunately for us, this document survives in its original format (the bulls are only preserved in later copies made in the 12th century). From this, we can see that it was written in a hand of the later 10th century, and not the late ninth. What is more, we can identify the script as that of Pilgrim himself, who was also responsible for a number of authentic privileges for Passau in the 970s.

It is this document that allows us to identify bishop with master forger (see box on page 30 for more details).

World of deception

What was the purpose of these texts? It was once thought that Pilgrim planned to present them to the pope, in order to facilitate the "restoration" of Passau to archiepiscopal status. More recently, historians have preferred to identify Pilgrim's audience at the imperial court, albeit with similar motives. Neither scenario seems particularly likely, however. Papal documents of the period were written on papyrus, a material vanishingly rare north of the Alps, and in a distinctive (and highly technical) script, which was little known outside Rome. It's therefore most improbable that Pilgrim's bulls would have looked the part. Given this, it seems more likely that Pilgrim had local audiences in mind: the cathedral canons at Passau, and perhaps also their haughty neighbours at Salzburg. Here such shortcomings might more easily pass unnoticed.

Pilgrim would doubtless have loved to have become archbishop. But he must have known that it was always a long shot – and there is no sign that he made a serious bid for elevation. The real aim of his forgeries was to provide a suitably glorious history for Passau, one that could be placed alongside that of Salzburg. This is revealed by Pilgrim's choice of sources. All of his bogus bulls are modelled on earlier Salzburg texts; the same is true of his false royal privileges. Pilgrim wanted for Passau everything he had seen at Salzburg.

This is not to say that Pilgrim's forgeries were an entirely innocent exercise. They certainly were an attempt to deceive. But they were an attempt to do so in a world in which deception was increasingly common. In fact, Pilgrim's uncle, Frederick, had commissioned a number of forgeries in favour of Salzburg. Here, too, the bishop of Passau was learning lessons from his neighbours.

Above all, Pilgrim's forgeries speak of the new attitudes toward the past that were taking root throughout Europe. Bishops and their cathedral canons were starting to conceive of themselves as distinct communities, with histories of their own. It simply wouldn't do to have Passau's past shrouded in mystery. It had to be revealed, and where it could not, it would have to be invented. Pilgrim was not the first to rise to this challenge, nor would he be the last. H

Levi Roach is associate professor of medieval history at the University of Exeter. His newest book, *Forgery and Memory at the End of the First Millennium*, will be published in February by Princeton University Press

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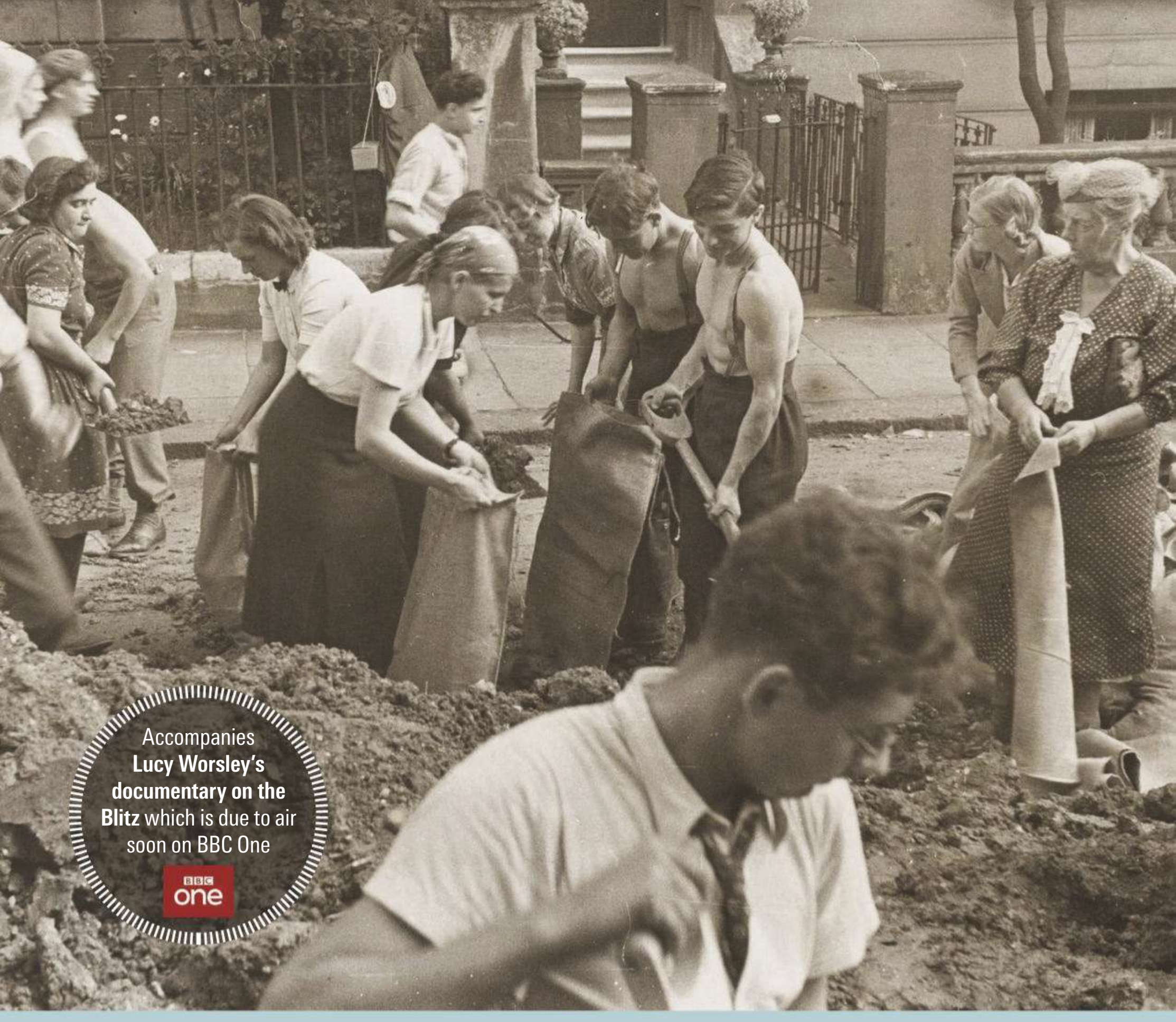


Accompanies **Lucy Worsley's documentary on the Blitz** which is due to air soon on BBC One

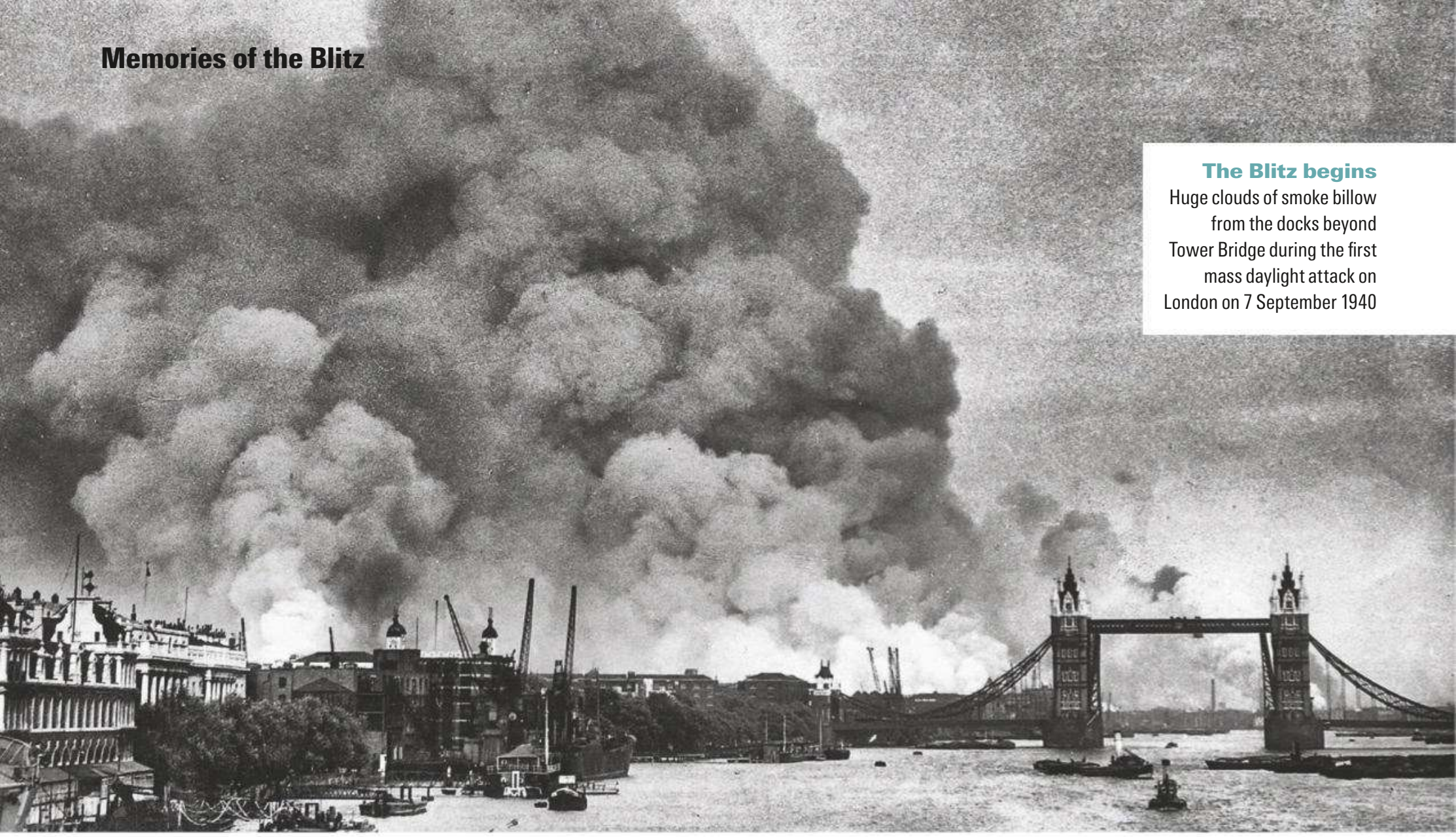
BBC one

MARY EVANS

They said that Londoners could take it. But could they?

Dig for victory
Volunteers shovel sand in Fulham in 1941, filling bags used to protect windows from bomb blasts. Our clichés of the Blitz don't tell the whole story, writes Lucy Worsley

Lucy Worsley tells the stories of six people who endured the London Blitz, and finds that it was a time of courage and resilience, doubt and despair



The Blitz begins
Huge clouds of smoke billow from the docks beyond Tower Bridge during the first mass daylight attack on London on 7 September 1940

What does "Blitz Spirit" really mean? It's a concept that's frequently invoked in times of crisis: a curiously British commitment to keeping calm and carrying on.

Eighty years on from the Blitz, though, it's worth remembering that the eight months of intense bombing between September 1940 and May 1941 did not comprise just one single, homogeneous experience for the people living in London and the many other British cities affected.

Those eight months were indeed a time of remarkable resilience, and of terrible suffering. Yet our clichéd images of the Blitz – jolly singalongs in the air raid shelters, milkmen continuing to deliver as usual to bombed-out houses – don't tell the whole story.

It seems timely, while we're facing a national crisis of our own, to drill down deeper into the nature of the "Blitz Spirit" – and one way to do that is to look in detail at the personal recollections of Londoners who were there, living and dying beneath the bombs. The government issued propaganda declaring that "London Can Take it" – but would these ordinary people have agreed?

A closer look shows us that Londoners experienced a whole spectrum of doubt and despair as well as the courage and resilience about which we more often hear. And it's hard to generalise: every person had their own unique experience of the Blitz, as the recollections of these six individuals reveal.

"You knew that if you didn't see your friends and have a good time, then you were never going to"

NAME: **Robert Barltrop**
AGE IN 1940: **17**
JOB: **Porter at Sainsbury's**

The day of 7 September 1940 had been a normal one for Robert, preparing chickens at the Sainsbury's in east London where he worked. But that afternoon he took up his lookout post on the roof of the building to see the very first raid of the Blitz coming in from the east. The German planes "were flying across my line of vision", he recalled. "I had a perfect view… they were heading straight for London, and it was going to be the docks that were going to get it… I began to hear thumps, and those were bombs falling, and clouds of smoke were rising up… until you couldn't see anything but a huge bank of smoke, and still they were coming."

Robert, however, was determined that life should go on; he rushed home that very evening – to go on a date. "It sounds daft but perhaps we both thought it was a bit romantic meeting in an air raid," he wrote. "We could smell the smoke and hear the raid."

He wasn't alone in thinking that some things were too important to give up, despite the Blitz. "You also had your own living life," he recalled. "Particularly if you were young, you felt a very strong need to make some kind of social life for yourself. You knew you were going to be called up before long and if you didn't see your friends and have a bit of a good time, then you were never going to."

Robert and his family survived a hit to their home, sheltering under their dining room table. But despite his insistence on living as normal a life as possible, the Blitz changed him. "Opportunities were taken away and intentions cancelled. Circles of friends were broken up and pursuits left behind: a great many of us were put on paths we had never envisaged."

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **HUGH COWLING**

ALAMY

"Press versions of life going on normally were grotesque"

NAME: **Nina Masel**
AGE IN 1940: **18**
JOB: **Reporter for the Mass Observation project**

Nina was a working-class teenager living in Stepney in the East End of London, and a talented writer. She was working in her family's local shop when she got a job recording her community's attitudes to the Blitz for social research reports that were then used by the media and government.

Nina was, perhaps more than most people, conscious of the gap between what the papers said about "Blitz Spirit" and the reality of the bombing in the East End. "Of course the press versions of life going on normally in the East End on Monday are grotesque," she wrote. "There was no bread, no milk, no electricity, no gas… The press version of people's smiling jollity and fun are a gross exaggeration. On no previous investigation has so little humour, laughter or whistling been recorded."

Nina is known particularly for her accounts of the enormous and notorious Tilbury air raid shelter in Stepney. "The first time I went in there, I had to come out," she wrote. "I felt sick. You just couldn't see anything, you could just smell the fug, the overwhelming stench… There were thousands and thousands of people lying head to toe… The place was a hell hole." Nina's report caught the eye of Winston Churchill, who insisted that conditions in the Tilbury Shelter be improved.

But when the Ministry of Information twisted a Mass Observation report on the safety of shallow air raid shelters, which East Enders widely believed to be dangerous, Nina felt that she and the other researchers were being misrepresented, and she resigned. "I left soon afterwards," she said, "in a blaze of indignation and fury."

ALAMY

Human cost In what is likely a propaganda shot, a Londoner is rescued from a wrecked house in September 1940. Those who didn't survive the raids were pieced together by volunteer nurses

"These frightful pieces of flesh had once been living, breathing people"

NAME: **Frances Faviell**
AGE IN 1940: **34**
JOB: **Artist and nurse**

Well off, living in Chelsea, working as an artist: Frances seemed to have life sorted. But the Blitz turned her world completely upside down.

She trained as a volunteer nurse, along with her housekeeper, and they took turns to pretend to be wounded. "It did seem ridiculous to have to lie flat on a piece of marked pavement pretending to be a casualty," she recalled.

But as Frances listened to wireless reports of the war's progress, she began to feel a new seriousness. "I could listen in my beautiful room surrounded by comfort and with a good meal waiting downstairs," she wrote, "but I could not eat."

As the Blitz continued, Frances became increasingly committed to her new vocation, taking on extraordinarily challenging duties – not least piecing together the broken bodies of the dead in preparation for burial. "It was a very difficult task," she recalled. "There were so many pieces missing… the stench was the worst thing about it – that, and having to realise that these frightful pieces of flesh had once been living, breathing people. We went out to smoke cigarettes when we simply could not go on."

By the time of the penultimate big raid on London in April 1941, Frances was living with her second husband, Richard Parker, and was four months pregnant. Her house was hit, but she was able to crawl out of its smoking ruins – and her son, John Parker, is still alive today.

"People believe that because I am a man of colour, I am a lucky omen"

NAME: **Ita Ekpenyon**
AGE IN 1940: **41**
JOB: **Student and air raid warden**

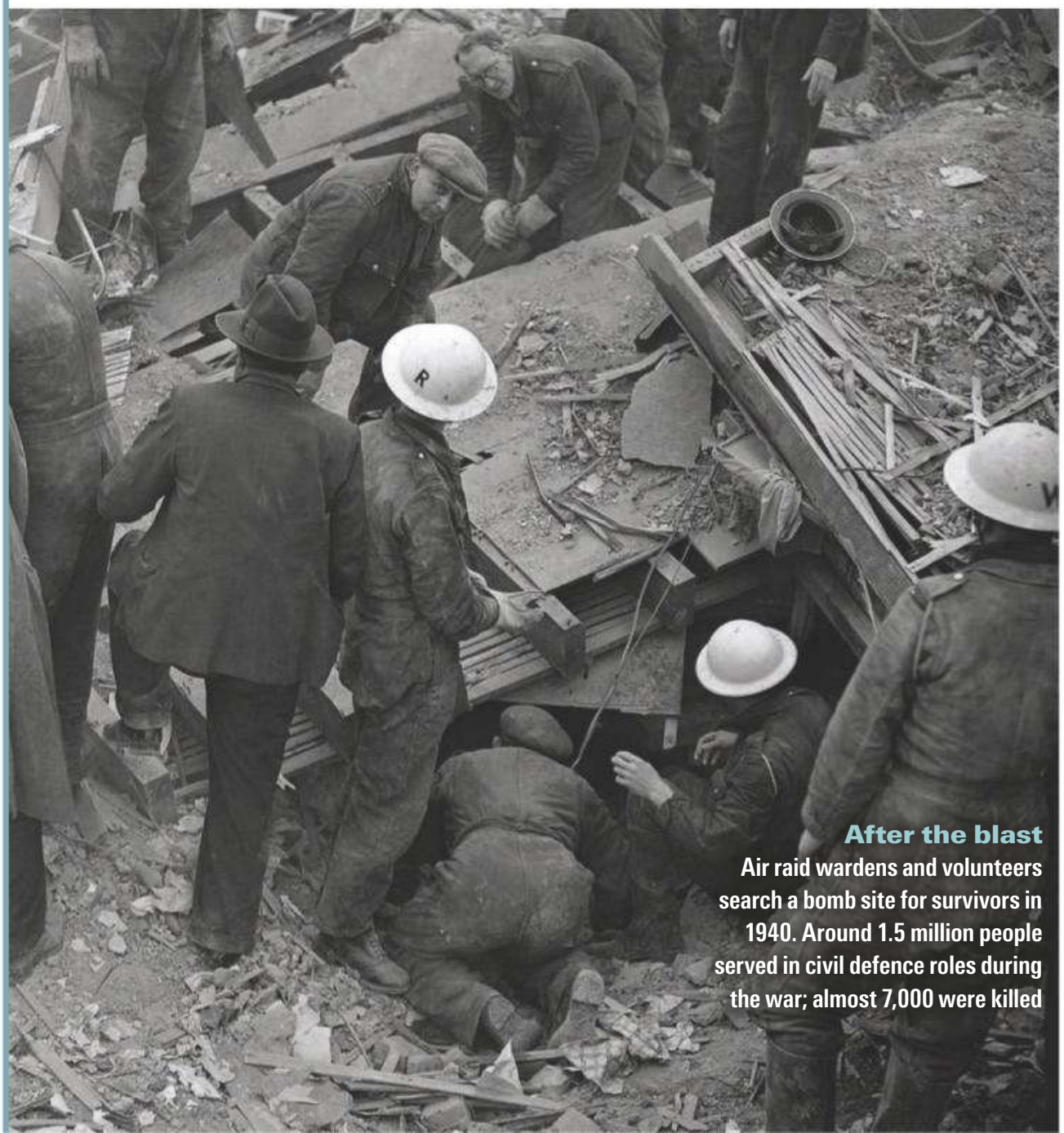
Ita was born in Nigeria, where he worked as a teacher before coming to London in 1928 to study law. When war broke out he was living at 146 Great Titchfield Street; he became an air raid warden, with Marylebone his local patch. Ita's job was to make sure that people obeyed the blackout rules, to keep order in the shelters, and to help people to safety during raids.

One of a small community of only 15,000 Londoners of African origin, Ita is among the most well-known of the black people who experienced the Blitz, largely because he wrote a memoir of his service.

Some of the people on his patch considered it "lucky" to have a black warden. "It amuses me," he wrote, "that in the district where I work the people believe that because I am a man of colour, I am a lucky omen. I had heard of such child-like beliefs, but I am delighted that such beliefs exist."

But he also experienced the casual racism that was common in 1940s London. Once he had to intervene to prevent some foreigners from being ejected from a shelter, recalling that: "Some of the shelterers told the others to go back to their own countries." Ita told them that he "would like to see a spirit of friendliness, cooperation and comradeship prevail at this very trying time in the history of the empire".

Calm and friendly, Ita noted that his very presence "seemed to cheer the people, for they felt the wardens were looking after them". After the war he became a postman. He died in 1951.



After the blast
Air raid wardens and volunteers search a bomb site for survivors in 1940. Around 1.5 million people served in civil defence roles during the war; almost 7,000 were killed

"Thank God we can laugh at this sort of thing"

NAME: **Frank Hurd**
AGE IN 1940: **44**
JOB: **Fireman**

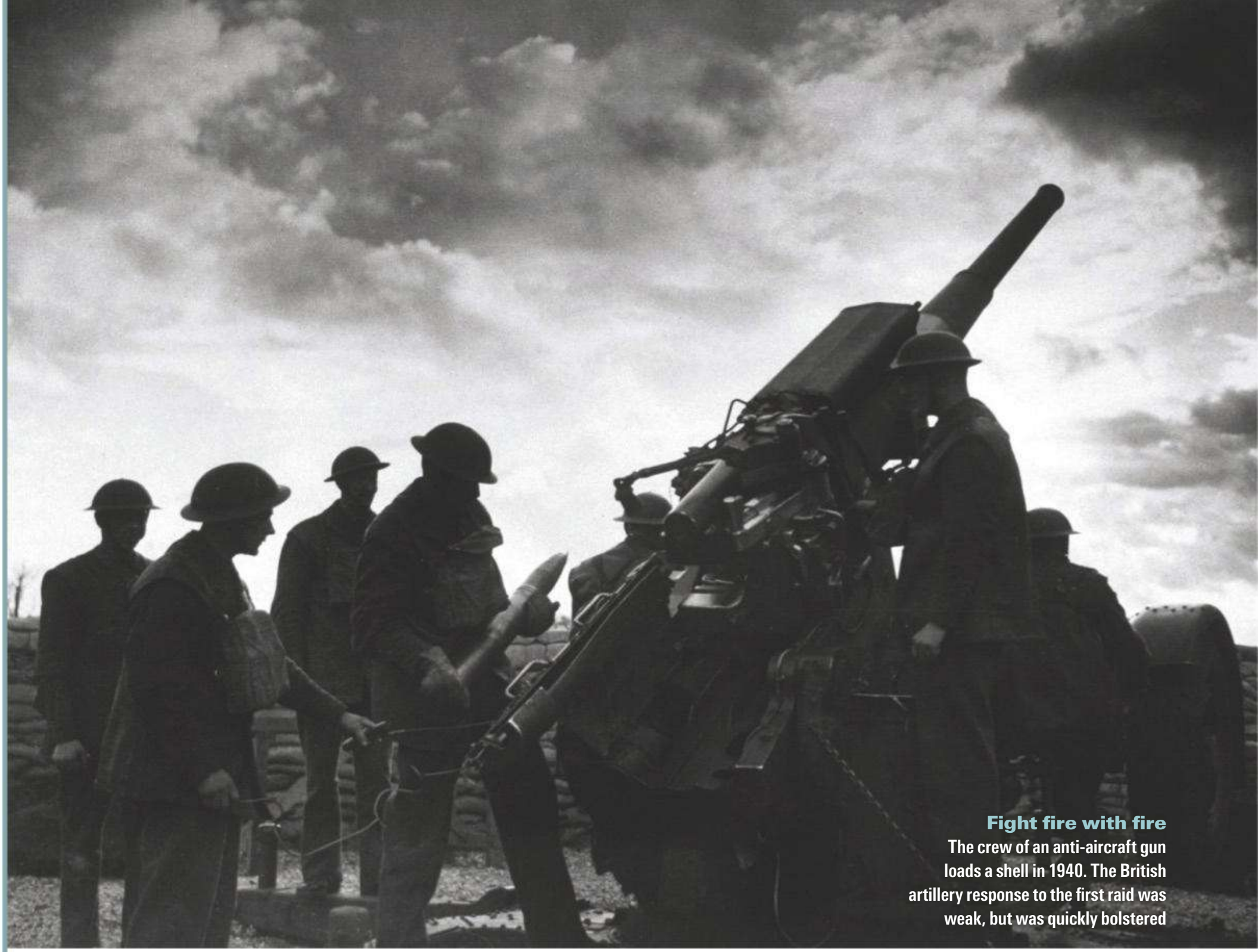
By September 1940, Islington-born Frank was more than ready for action, having prepared for months before the Blitz began. He and his colleagues in the Auxiliary Fire Service had "half-hoped for something to happen", though they also "felt ashamed for letting the monotony get us down".

When the first bombs finally fell, though, Frank had more than enough excitement. On the first night of the Blitz he was called to Beckton Gas Works in east London, where he first experienced a bomb falling, describing "a weird whistling sound... then a vivid flash of flame, a column of earth and debris flying into the air, and the ground heaved".

Night after night, Frank fought fires; his diary, now in the Imperial War Museum, tells a story of steady, unremitting, cheerful service. He never seemed to lose his nerve, nor his commitment to his work. "Perhaps I have made light of a serious situation," he wrote, "but thank God we can laugh at this sort of thing."

If ever a Londoner kept calm and carried on, it was Frank. Tragically, though, on the night of 29 December 1940, during the so-called "Second Great Fire of London", he was seriously injured fighting fires near Smithfield Market, and died in hospital the following day.

GETTY IMAGES/IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM



Fight fire with fire
The crew of an anti-aircraft gun loads a shell in 1940. The British artillery response to the first raid was weak, but was quickly bolstered

"This wasn't war – it was murder"

NAME: **Barbara Nixon**
AGE IN 1940: **33**
JOB: **Actor and air raid warden**

Until the war threw her career off course, Barbara had worked as an actor. In May 1940, though, she went to Finsbury Town Hall to sign up as one of the first female air raid wardens.

A practical person and a socialist, Barbara joined up because, she explained, it seemed "the most active and obviously helpful Civil Defence occupation open to women… I wanted an active job; I particularly wanted to avoid the position of many women in the First World War – of urging other people to do work they wouldn't think of doing themselves."

Barbara and her fellow wardens were given a tin hat and a whistle, but only a vague idea of their duties. The priority seemed to be to report where bombs had fallen, followed by providing reassurance to members of the public. "Our only asset," she thought, "was our zeal to help."

On the late afternoon of 7 September, Barbara witnessed the first big raid on London – a devastating onslaught that set fire to the East End. Then, coming off duty, she went into Soho for dinner. Along with many others, Barbara hadn't yet grasped that this first raid had been merely the overture: the intention of the initial attack had been to start fires to act as beacons, guiding in the many more bombers that would follow that night.

"That day, London had changed," Barbara said, "like a drunk man suddenly sobering up when he receives tragic news."

The following morning's newspapers were positive, declaring that London could "take it", and that the damage had been surprisingly slight. But Barbara observed that, despite the censorship of the press, people suspected the truth: "The most common saying by men, as well as women, was that this wasn't war, it was murder." There was a sense of defeat.

Once British artillery began to return fire, though, a more conventional glimpse of "Blitz Spirit" emerged in Barbara's account. "On Wednesday they brought up the guns at last," she wrote. "There had never been such an exhilarating uproar… it was a splendid and deafening cacophony. It was said that they fired 20,000 shells that night; it may have been extravagant, and not particularly effective, but it was worth it. It revived the spirit of the Londoners." H

Lucy Worsley is a historian, broadcaster and author. Her documentary on the experiences of Londoners who lived through the Blitz is due to air on BBC One soon

BBC one

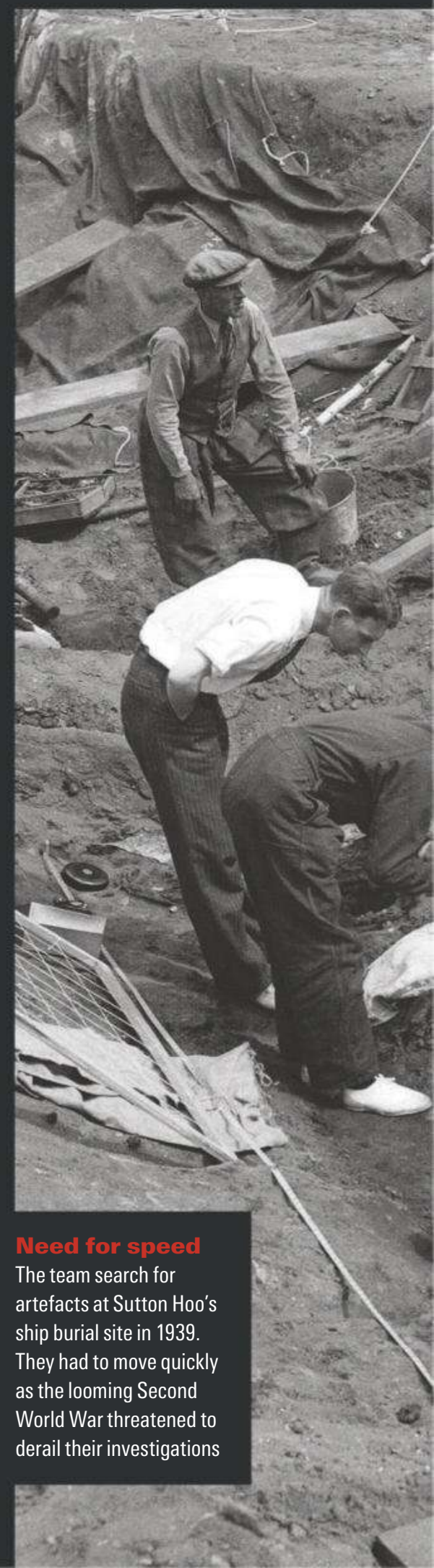
GETTY IMAGES

ILLUSTRATIONS BY **HUGH COWLING**

Treasure

Sutton Hoo's seventh-century treasures have fired up the imaginations **Professor Martin Carver** talks to David Musgrove about a remarkable

Out with the old
Excavators in the trench at Sutton Hoo, 1939. The dig was first directed by self-taught archaeologist Basil Brown, but soon an establishment team was drafted in to take over



Need for speed
The team search for artefacts at Sutton Hoo's ship burial site in 1939. They had to move quickly as the looming Second World War threatened to derail their investigations

trove

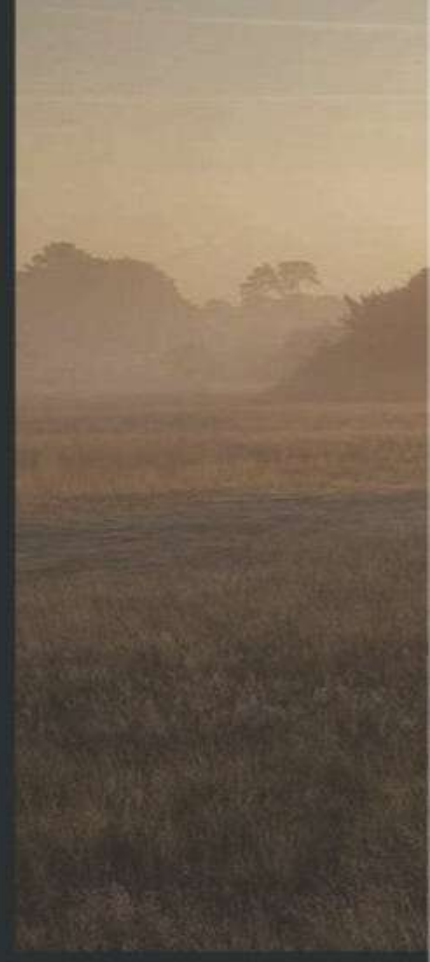
of history lovers for decades, most recently inspiring new film *The Dig*.
excavation that took place in the shadow of the Second World War

BRITISH MUSEUM

Impressive hoard
The Sutton Hoo helmet is arguably the most iconic relic to be found at the site. Sutton Hoo's treasures have transformed our understanding of early medieval England

Curious spirit
Edith Pretty, the owner of Sutton Hoo from 1926 until 1942. After her husband died, in the late 1930s she organised an investigation of the 18 earthen mounds dotted around her land

Determined digger
Archaeologist Basil Brown, who was hired by Edith Pretty to excavate Sutton Hoo's mounds. Despite lacking formal training, in the summer of 1938 he uncovered evidence of a ship burial



Portal to the past
The sun sets over Sutton Hoo's burial mounds. Although they had been subject to excavations prior to Brown's investigations in the 1930s, many of the beautiful artefacts had been left undisturbed

"The weather worried them more than the war. If war was going to come, it was going to come, but the weather could damage the site while they were digging it." That's Professor Martin Carver's take on a key concern of the Sutton Hoo excavation team as they rushed to unearth and record the fabulous – and now globally famous – seventh-century ship burial in rural Suffolk, during the summer before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Carver is a leading expert on Sutton Hoo, and he directed excavations there for a decade from 1983.

However, it's that 1939 dig that is going to come into sharp focus again, as it's the subject of new Netflix film *The Dig* (itself based on a book by the same name, written by John Preston). It's a story that demands to be told. Not only does it involve the discovery of astonishing treasures that reshaped our understanding of the period, set to the backdrop of looming global catastrophe, but it also has a cast of characters who are entirely fascinating in their own rights.

First, we need to meet Edith Pretty. In 1926 she and her husband, Colonel Frank Pretty, purchased Sutton Hoo House and its estate of sandy heath and woodland. Colonel Pretty died in 1934, survived by Edith and their young son, Robert. The widowed Mrs Pretty decided to investigate the curious cluster of 18 raised earth mounds that she could see from the window of her house. She had travelled to Egypt, and she had watched her father excavate a Cistercian monastery in Cheshire in her youth, so she knew a bit about how archaeology worked.

"When Colonel and Mrs Pretty bought the estate, they realised they'd also bought a monument. She decided to excavate there after he died, probably because she was intellectually curious, although there was this element of a lonely widow hoping to make some sort of contact with the other world that her husband had gone to. She did have a medium in London, whom she consulted about getting in touch with this other world," explains Carver.

So Mrs Pretty engaged the services of a local man, Basil Brown. He was a self-taught archaeologist, recommended by Ipswich Museum. Mrs Pretty paid him 30 shillings a week and provided two labourers to work with him. In June 1938, Brown began work, and over the course of the summer, he ran trenches into several mounds. Incredibly, he found something that every earlier excavator had missed: evidence for a ship burial in Mound 2, demonstrated by the presence of scattered iron rivets of the kind used in early clinker-built ships. He also uncovered artefacts that were indicative of an early medieval date for the mounds, and he found that all of the barrows he looked at had already been subject to excavation.

Looters and antiquarians

As Carver explains, there had been two previous periods of interest in what was under those mounds at Sutton Hoo.

"One was in the 16th century, which was

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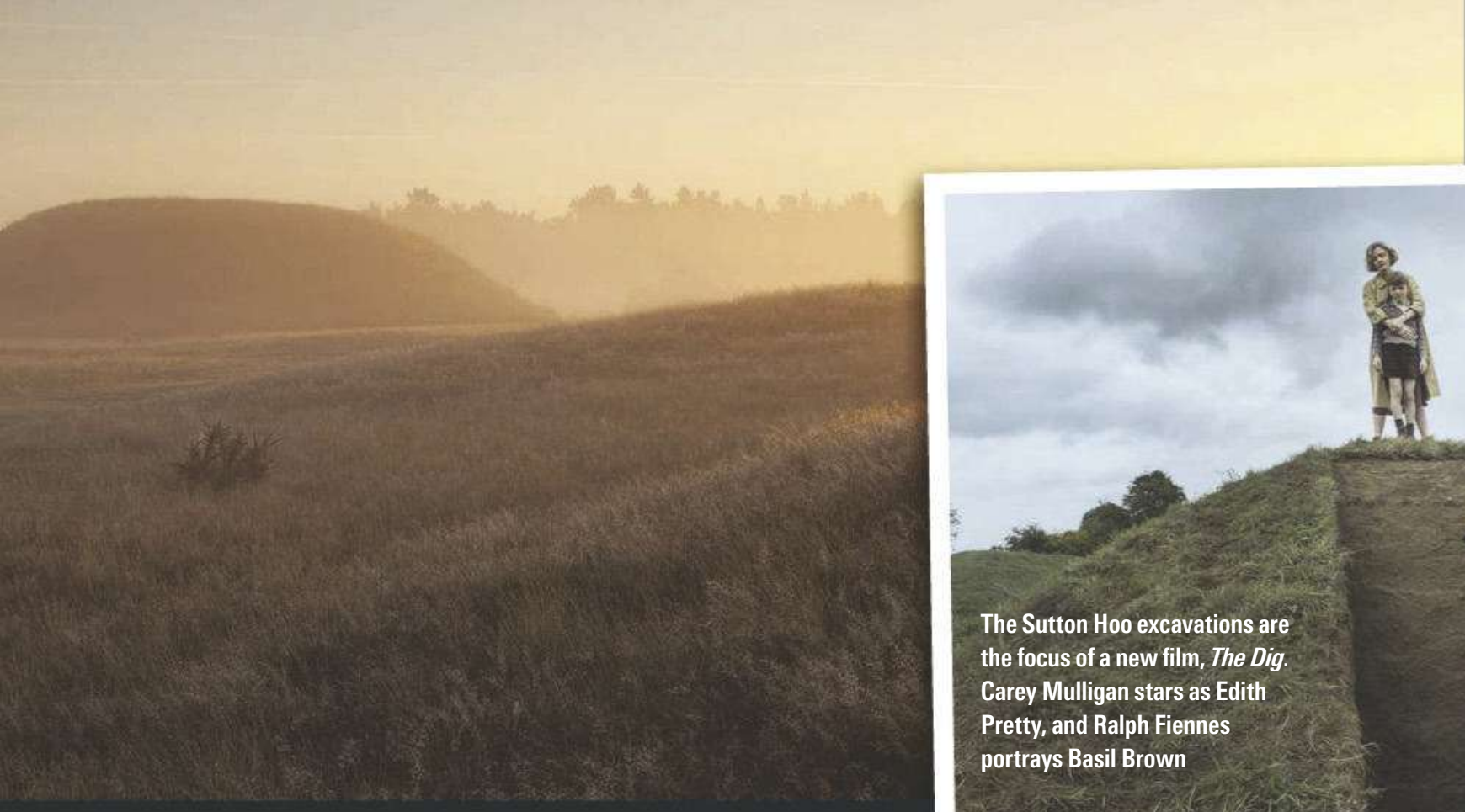
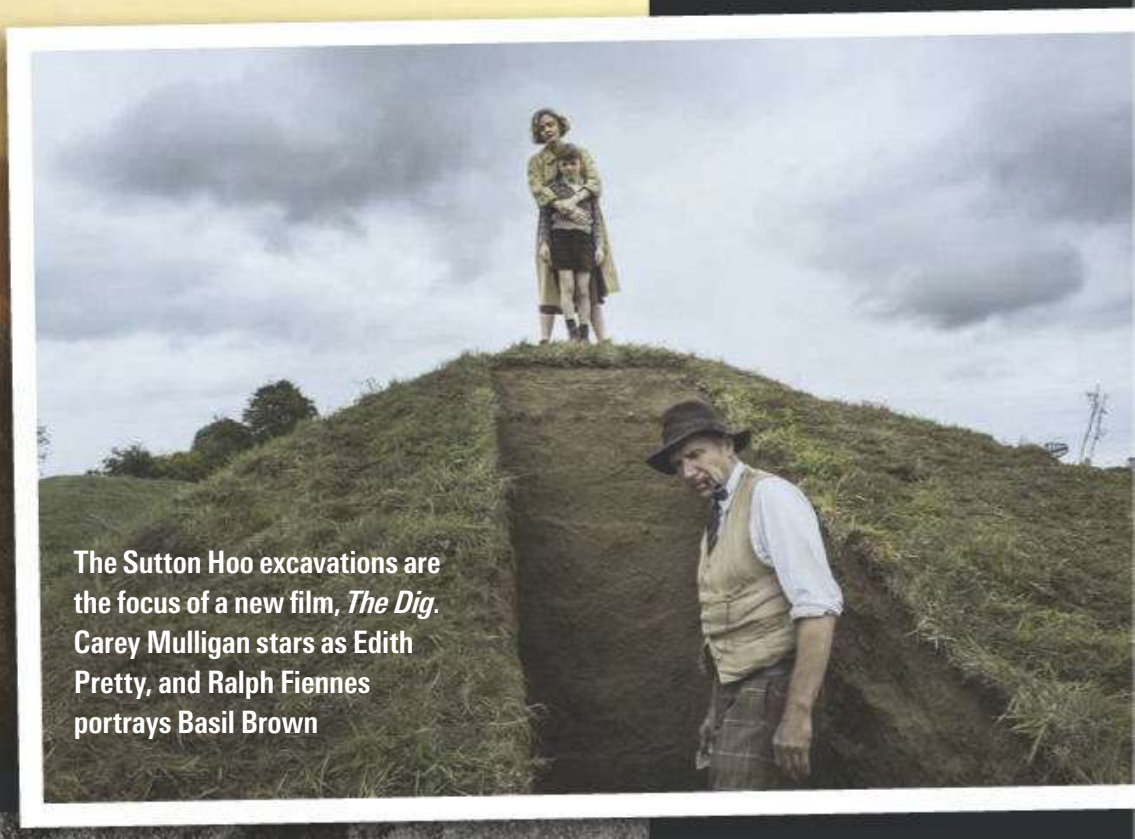
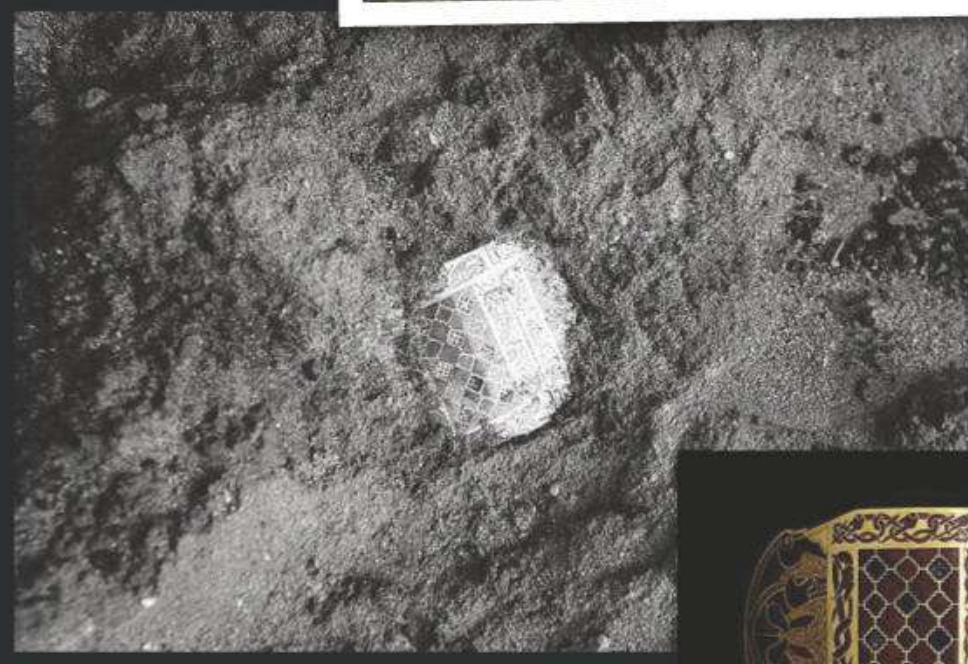




The Sutton Hoo excavations are the focus of a new film, *The Dig*. Carey Mulligan stars as Edith Pretty, and Ralph Fiennes portrays Basil Brown



All that glitters
Hundreds of priceless early medieval artefacts have been found at Sutton Hoo, including shoulder clasps (shown left, during excavations in the 1930s, and below), gold buckles and silver cutlery

The excavation was set to the backdrop of looming global catastrophe and has a cast of fascinating characters

NATIONAL TRUST IMAGES–JUSTIN MINNS/LARRY HORRICKS/NETFLIX©2021/BRITISH MUSEUM

really a looting operation. The technique there was to drill down a big shaft into the centre of the mound and then help yourself to whatever was in them. A lot of the mounds had been treated in this way. Then in the 19th century, there was a slightly more antiquarian approach. The mounds became the subject of more curiosity, and they were dug into with trenches."

Mrs Pretty was keen for a second season of excavation, despite the risk that the mounds had already all been robbed out and the fact that Europe was tensing for war. British prime minister Neville Chamberlain had signed the Munich Agreement with Adolf Hitler in September 1938, but the peace deal had already unravelled by March 1939 with Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia. Nevertheless, Basil Brown was back on site in Sutton Hoo on 8 May 1939.

Mound 1, the largest of the barrows, was the object of interest. According to Brown's diary, it was chosen by his employer. He records that Mrs Pretty pointed to it and said: "What about this?", to which he laconically replied that "it would be quite alright for me".

Again, Brown was assisted by two men: John Jacobs, one of Mrs Pretty's gardeners, and William Spooner, her gamekeeper. On 11 May, Jacobs spotted an iron rivet, which Brown knew, from his work the previous year, was likely to have been from a ship burial. So he began the search to find more and was soon adept at spotting them in situ. It required a more delicate excavating approach, as Carver explains:

"So he took his pastry brush, which he got from Mrs Pretty, and just dusted down the top of each rivet. It made a little red stain, where the iron had rusted, and he gradually worked his way down inside the ship. There wasn't any wood there, just a black stain here and there, but mostly the pattern of the rivets guided him down and down until he got to the chamber."

After a few days, a large trench had been cut into the mound, which was revealing the outline of the buried ship's hull. It also revealed the dangers of Brown's excavation technique: on 30 May the trench collapsed, and he was buried for several minutes.

That wasn't enough to stop him, though, as Brown had been buried in trench collapses several times before. However, when word of his findings leaked out into academia, Brown's role in the excavation was in much more peril.

A Cambridge archaeologist called Charles Phillips heard rumours of an interesting find, so he paid a visit. "He describes his amazement, even horror, when he saw this fantastically huge heap of earth and then the giant trench beside it and the rows and rows of rivets. 'Oh my godfathers' was the expression he used," says Carver.

Phillips called the British Museum, and soon the Office of Works was involved. It was decided that a more experienced excavation team was needed for what was clearly a significant find. Brown was ordered to stand down, though he didn't seem to take heed of that instruction, as he carried on working on the outline of the ship for several weeks afterwards while the higher authorities were

Race against the clock
A view of the excavation of the ship burial site at Sutton Hoo. When they weren't receiving visitors, the archaeological team rushed to complete their investigations before world war was declared

"If they'd put the earth back in, by the end of the war there would have been nothing left in there. So they had to go on with it"

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concerned with marshalling their resources.

"The problem was the imminent threat of the Second World War. The Office of Works was in charge of a lot of other things besides archaeology. So it was busy reinforcing the dockyards, and the British Museum was busy preparing to move its collections into the London underground where they were going to spend the war," explains Carver. "It wasn't the ideal moment to start a big dig. On the other hand, how could they not finish it? If they had put the earth back in, by the end of the war there would have been nothing left in there, because everybody would have had a good old dibble. So they had to go on with it."

And get on with it they did. Phillips assembled a team of up-and-coming archaeologists to help him take on the task. Of these newcomers, Carver says: "These were mainly people who had other jobs, but they were awaiting call up, so they were available during that hot summer of 1939. Stuart Piggott was the best digger and probably the best archaeological brain among them. WF Grimes became a professor later. Peggy Piggott (who later became curator of Devizes Museum) was married to Stuart at the time. OGS Crawford came along. Grahame Clark was there for important days. So it was like a boatload of professors-to-be."

But, according to Carver, one man stood head and shoulders above the rest. "When it came to excavating and recording, Stuart Piggott was the standout star. He was not only a very good archaeological recorder, but he was also an artist and a poet. He was an extraordinary person. I doubt whether anybody could have done as good a job as him now, if faced with those circumstances."

Sunken treasures

The new team started work on 13 July. By the end of that month, the excavation was over. In just 17 days, they had dug up the burial chamber at the heart of the ship and found a wealth of amazing artefacts that have now become synonymous with the early Anglo-Saxon period: 263 items of weaponry, silver plate, jewellery and the now world-famous helmet. It was a truly unprecedented discovery which challenged existing ideas of the period, helping to undermine the idea of this being the "Dark Ages".

Despite the riches coming out of the ground, the team was not blessed with great resources, relying on a shepherd's hut on wheels for shelter and very basic tools and equipment. But the weather was kind to them in July 1939, and they didn't have to contend with the rain that would have added considerably to the challenges of the excavation.

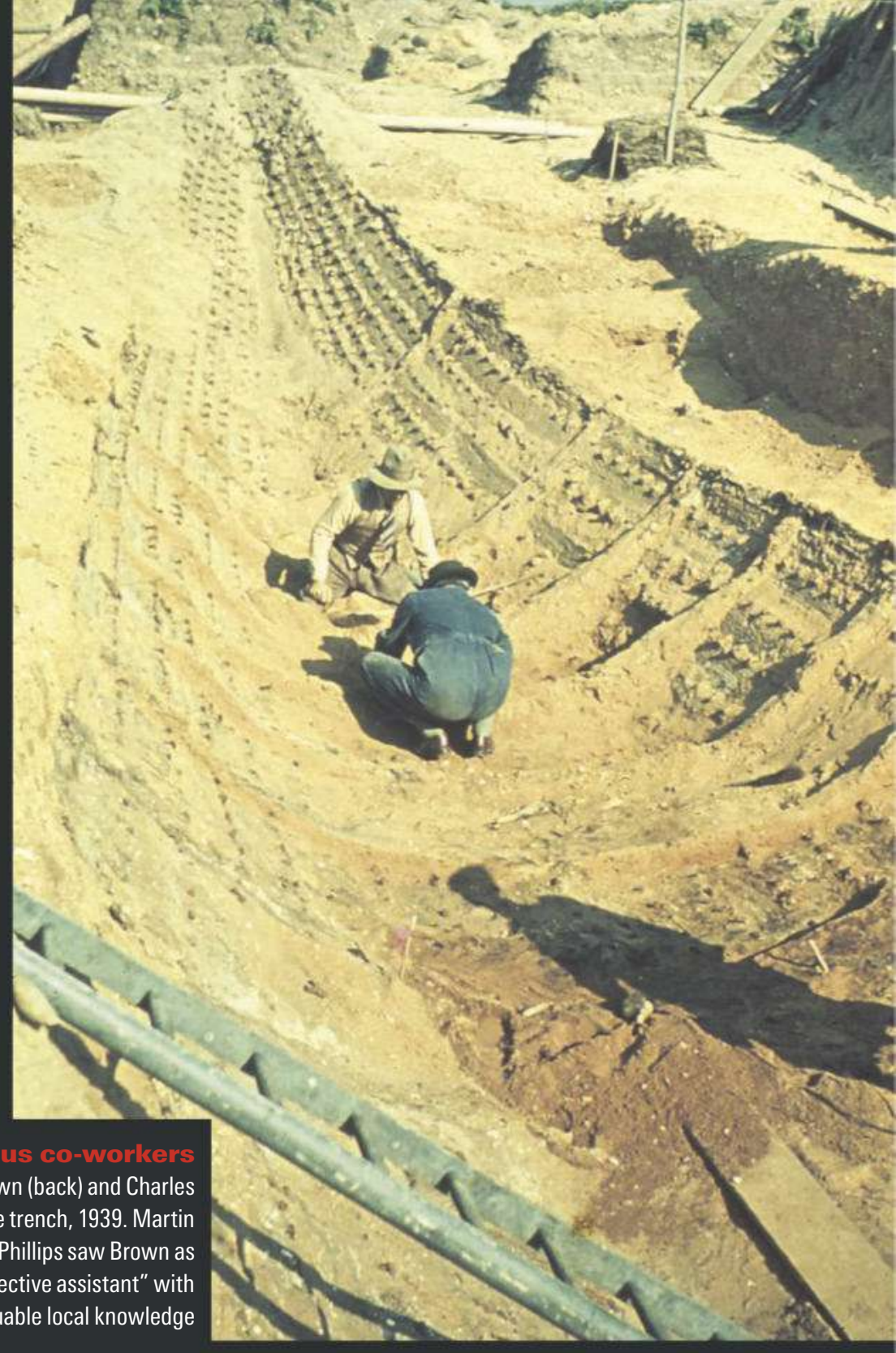
But what of Basil Brown? Among Phillips

MORE FROM US

An **in-depth interview** with Professor Martin Carver about the 1938/39 digs and the treasures of Sutton Hoo will be released on our podcast soon at *historyextra.com/podcast*

Best-laid plans Charles Phillips presents papers to Edith Pretty (right) and Queen Victoria's granddaughter Princess Marie Louise who was visiting the site

Up and coming
WF Grimes digs out an iron stand at the ship burial site, 1939. Many of the team went on to become professors



Courteous co-workers
Basil Brown (back) and Charles Phillips in the trench, 1939. Martin Carver claims Phillips saw Brown as "an effective assistant" with invaluable local knowledge

and his team, where does he fit in the story?

"Unquestionably, he did a good job," says Carver. "He's the one who gave us the shape of the ship. Between Basil Brown, whom you might call an archaeologist of genius powered by native wit, and the establishment figures from university, there's another layer, and that's the museum curators in Ipswich. Those people were more officious and criticised Brown, as he records in his diary. And he's extraordinarily stoical about this criticism, more or less saying, 'They'll say that, but I'm right.' And he was, too.

"Phillips was given the job of finishing this excavation, and like everybody who's given a job, he might have abrogated to himself a certain amount of power. He probably thought to himself: 'I'm in charge. I've got my own peers working with me. What do I do with Basil?' I've said in the past that Basil was relegated to steerage class by the university team, but I think that's a bit unkind. Phillips described him as an effective assistant. I think he understood him and what he'd done very well, but he wanted to impose a new kind of more precise recording on the burial chamber. This is perfectly understandable."

Brown was a self-educated working man, whose background was markedly different to the university team. Whether there was any class dimension or academic snobbery in play in his treatment, Carver reminds us that, at Sutton Hoo, Brown's local knowledge must have been invaluable: "On the whole, people were very well-mannered and very courteous to each other. We don't have any evidence that they weren't, and you can bet your boots that they listened very carefully to Basil."

Magistrates and mediums

When war was declared in September, the dig was finished, but a Commander Hutchinson from the National Maritime Museum continued to work on recording the site while he still could. There was also a Treasure Trove inquest into who owned this million-pound grave. It was held in the local village hall, and the magistrate decided in favour of the landowner, Mrs Pretty, concluding that it was not treasure (and therefore government property) as the deposition of the objects was in the context of a burial (a body was never found in the grave, but that's most likely due to the acidic soil conditions).

Mrs Pretty, following consultation with her medium, decided to donate the finds to the nation. And she turned down the offer of being honoured for this act of archaeological altruism, saying that she had done nothing to deserve that, which makes her all the more fascinating as an individual.

Considering the magnitude of the treasures found at Sutton Hoo and the colourful characters involved in the excavations, it's hardly surprising that the story makes for rich pickings for authors and script-writers.

"The book [on which the Netflix film is based] is a real drama about people. It's more about the people than it is about the dig. I think if you pull back the lens a bit, then the drama is even more exciting than that. It's a drama of different peoples, and different classes of people in England on the eve of the Second World War, investigating the major monument of the Germans who had invaded

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“I’m full of admiration for all the people who took part. They treated it as it should be treated: as a piece of history we all deserve to share”

Giving back
Sutton Hoo’s treasures, including this intricately carved gold belt buckle, were all donated to the British Museum by Edith Pretty. Intriguingly, the landowner rejected honours for her act of altruism

a thousand years earlier. And they’re awaiting the beginning of an invasion from modern Germany,” concludes Carver.

“That must have given people an extraordinary feeling of confusion in many ways. I’m full of admiration for all the people who took part in the excavation and researching the finds, especially that they treated it with such respect. They treated it as it should be treated, not as some sort of political totem, but as a piece of preserved history, which we all deserve to share.” H

Martin Carver is professor emeritus at the University of York and an expert on Sutton Hoo, leading excavations there from 1983 to 1993. His books on the topic include *The Sutton Hoo Story: Encounters with Early England* (Boydell Press, 2017)
David Musgrove is *BBC History Magazine’s* content director and a doctor of medieval archaeology

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WATCH AND READ

John Preston’s fictional account of the excavation, **The Dig**, was published by Penguin in 2008. The film of the same name is due to stream on Netflix from 29 January

THE WHO AND WHY OF SUTTON HOO

Martin Carver offers his own explanations for the early medieval mounds

Sutton Hoo is thought to be the burial ground of the early seventh-century rulers of one of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, which had grown up in the aftermath of the Roman imperial presence in Britain. Those mounds were, according to Carver, an explosive expression of intent from East Anglia’s pagan rulers against the spreading power of Christianity (Pope Gregory the Great famously sent Augustine as a missionary to England in AD 597).

“It’s a great burst of activity. I imagine these mounds must have been very demonstrative. The burials are extravagant and very richly furnished. They are strong statements about the wish to continue this particular regime, this dynasty, and in some ways there are signs of anxiety of what’s coming from over the Channel,” Carver says. “In other words, a more obvious Christian union, a kind of re-enactment of the Roman empire, which they really don’t want to be part of. So I think that’s why the investment is so big. People are calling to their gods, if you like, for protection.”

We can’t be sure of the figure memorialised in the famous ship burial, but the leading candidate – and the man Carver favours – is King Raedwald, who is thought to have died in the 620s. His burial chamber at the centre of the ship was surrounded by objects, both military and domestic, and it was perhaps intended to be a display on view for some time before earth was piled up on top of it.

“This was like a furnished mini-hall of the man lying in state. He had his personal things with him in the coffin, and on top were his warrior’s uniform and his equipment for hosting a feast [in the afterlife]. At one end of the chamber is cooking equipment, and at the other end is parade gear and regalia. It would have been a tremendous sight,” Carver says.

“In *my* imagination, and this is harder to prove,” Carver muses, “I think this spectacle would have been available for several days, perhaps longer, for people to walk round the edge and look in.”

According to Carver, the spectators “would be people who knew the dead man. One imagines this whole funeral was created by his unnamed wife, who seems to be quite a character [her story is referenced in Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, where she is said to have “seduced” her converted Christian husband back to paganism]. The people looking on would have recognised the famous objects in the burial chamber and explained what they were seeing to each other and to their children.”

This was a crucial means of relaying history at the time, as Carver says: “The next generation remembers what the last generation said and so on. So stories were handed down. We’re not dealing with a literate society. And of course, Christianity was a big threshold over which a lot of these stories never crossed, which is why archaeologists love to dig them up.”

Q&A

A selection of historical **conundrums** answered by experts

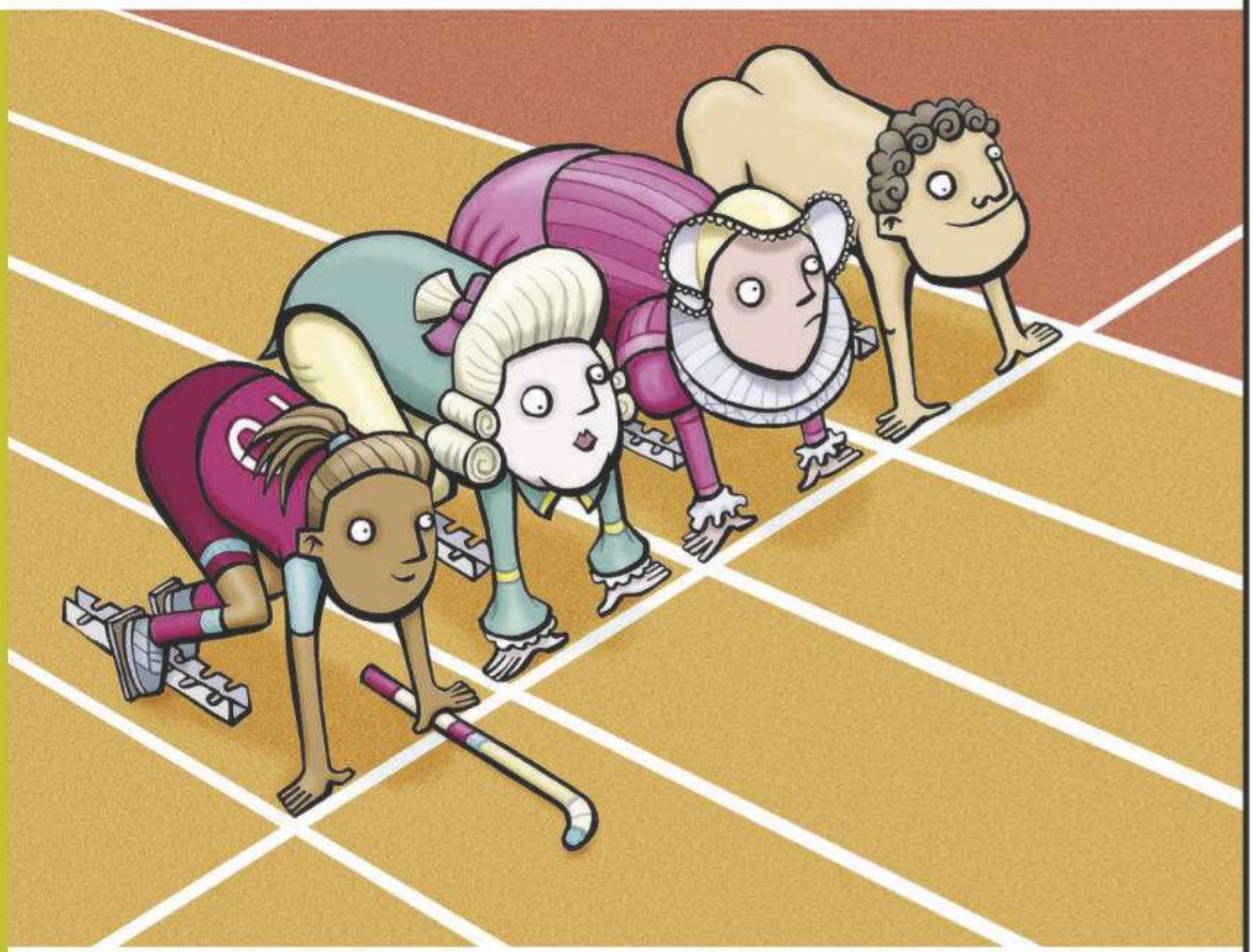

ILLUSTRATION BY **GLEN MCBETH**

How did people get up on time before alarm clocks?

Alarm clocks are older than you might think. An iron wall clock with a bronze bell was manufactured in 15th-century Nuremberg. And in the 16th and 17th centuries, many wealthy households had spring-driven clocks that struck an alarm each hour. The alarm mechanism could even be removed from some of these clocks when they were not in use. Samuel Pepys wrote of his "larum watch", or alarm clock, in his diary.

For those who didn't have such contraptions, however, the sounds of crowing roosters and mooing cows were habitual audio cues to awaken people from sleep. But perhaps the most common (at least in Europe) was the sound of parish bells ringing out from the local church. Regular sleep patterns probably also ensured that people's internal body clocks played an important role in waking people up at a regular hour each morning.

Sasha Handley, historian and author of *Sleep in Early Modern England* (Yale University Press, 2016)

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Alarm clocks – such as this 16th-century timepiece – were common items in wealthy households during the 16th and 17th centuries

What is the oldest sport that is still played today?

Let's agree to exclude competitive board games, such as Mancala. Let's also agree that for a sport to be a "sport", it has to be held outdoors, competitively, either individually or collectively (team sport), and according to officially and publicly agreed rules, whether sacred or secular. And finally, let's agree that "still played" means played (pretty much) continuously from when it's first historically attested right up to today.

On that basis, there is only one contender or candidate for the "oldest, continuous and still practised" sport: namely competitive athletics, and more specifically, sprinting. And that originated in ancient Greece in around 775 BC, some 2,800 years ago. Our word "athletics" is derived from the ancient Greek word for "prize", *athlon*.

(And to those of you who might want to say: "But what about hockey, which seems to be illustrated in a tomb painting from Beni Hasan in Egypt that dates back 4,000 years, to about 2000 BC?" I reply: what's the evidence that hockey has been played continuously in Egypt, or anywhere else for that matter, over the past 4,000 years?)

The 200 metres dash was the original – and originally the only – event at the Olympic Games, though it may come as a shock to some to be told that the competitors (who were all free adult males) were required to run stark naked. The ancient Olympic Games, unlike the modern revival, ran without a single break for some 1,100 years (from 776 BC to the 390s AD). Competitive sprinting continued thereafter in the Christian medieval world and was adopted elsewhere, until the event eventually went global in the revived, post-1896 Olympics that we still hold today.

Paul Cartledge, emeritus AG Leventis professor of Greek culture at Clare College, University of Cambridge

Well-wishers bid farewell to a ship in the 19th century. Ship and airline crews today still use "Souls on Board" to denote the number of travellers

GETTY IMAGES

Why do people say "souls" for the number of people onboard?

In Christianity and many other religions, humans comprise both body – the visible physical structure – and soul, the invisible spirit. When death separates body and soul, the latter lives on.

But "soul" isn't just a religious term: it's been historically used in travel, too. A not-very-scientific search of the British Newspaper Archive for "Souls on Board" reveals that the expression peaked in the UK press in Victorian times. Aside from telling us of the religiosity of the age, it also shows the increase in ship and rail travel, and the corresponding rise in accidents.

When "SOS" became an internationally recognised maritime distress signal in the early 20th century, it was widely taken to mean "Save Our Souls", though in fact its usefulness was in the clear and distinctive repetition of three dots and three dashes.

But what might seem a journalistic or religious cliché was also a useful technical term denoting the total number of people on board as opposed to, say, livestock. (Slaves in 18th and 19th-century ships seem to have counted as souls, not cargo.) Official passenger and crew lists might not account for infants, stowaways or others who had boarded unrecorded, but the total number of "souls" is clear and simple.

Ship and airline crews still use "Souls on Board" (or "People on Board"). On modern airliners, babies and small children aren't always on passenger lists, and dead bodies being carried in caskets don't count, but the tally of "souls" is the number of survivors and victims who need to be accounted for in an accident.

Eugene Byrne, author and journalist specialising in history

DID YOU KNOW...?

Kick in the teeth

The body of John Milton (pictured) was exhumed more than a century after his death, and some of his teeth were sold. During renovation work on St Giles-without-Cripplegate in 1790, what was assumed to be the poet's body, buried there in 1674, was disturbed. One parishioner "pulled hard at the teeth". When they refused to budge, "someone hit them a knock with a stone, when they easily came out". The pearly whites were then put on sale.

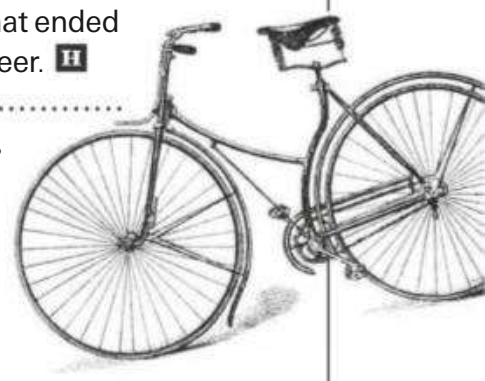
Tragic telescope

The largest refracting telescope in the world once stood in a 60-foot-high brick tower on Wandsworth Common in south London. It was the brainchild of a vicar, amateur architect and astronomer named John Craig who spent a small fortune on constructing it in 1852. There were problems with the lens from the beginning, however. In addition, Craig suffered a series of bereavements and was imprisoned briefly for misappropriation of church funds in 1856. The telescope was dismantled the following year.

Bumpy ride

A well-known 19th-century French composer died after he lost control of his bicycle coming down a hill, and crashed into a brick wall. Originally trained for the law, Ernest Chausson switched to music in his twenties and became friends with other composers such as Fauré and Debussy. He was only 44, and much admired for his chamber music, when he and his daughter, holidaying in the Île-de-France, set off on the bike ride that ended his life and career. H

Nick Rennison, writer and journalist specialising in history



Ernest Chausson died after losing control of his bicycle and speeding into a brick wall

THE MEDIEVAL GUIDE TO CHILDBIRTH

Having a baby in medieval Europe presented women with a set of acute challenges – and dangers. From what to drink while in labour to the best saints to beseech for a safe pregnancy, **Elma Brenner** offers six tips for those preparing for motherhood in the Middle Ages

Welcome sight
A mother receives her newborn baby in a c1490 text written for Henry VII. Childbirth in the Middle Ages exposed both mother and child to great peril but, writes Elma Brenner, midwives had the expertise to intervene when complications arose

BRIDGEMAN

Call the midwife

As labour pains kicked in, many medieval women leant on the expertise of experienced professionals

Childbirth in the Middle Ages was a community effort. Family members, parish priests and local experts all lent a hand – and when midwives were called in to assist, they often worked in teams. A late 12th-century English account describes the presence of seven midwives at the labour of Eliza of Middleton. Such a large team could pool their knowledge and share the demanding tasks involved in assisting the delivery.

These women could find their services called upon in all kinds of circumstances. In 1259 in the French village of Saint-Saëns, two local midwives attended the nun Nicola of Rouen, who gave birth inside her nunnery. Nicola's child was baptised, probably by a priest at the monastery, although midwives were themselves empowered to perform baptism in cases where the child's soul was in peril.

Midwives were expected to be moral arbiters, looking out for instances of illegitimacy – no doubt the case for Nicola's baby – and infanticide. At the same time, their own conduct came under scrutiny. In 1481 the English midwife Agnes Marshall was accused of using quasi-magical incantations. Indeed, English midwives, poorly paid and sometimes suspected of witchcraft, had a less positive experience than their counterparts in France and Germany, who received professional training and were officially employed by town governments, even if they earned much less than male medical practitioners.

Physicians and surgeons only rarely assisted women in childbirth, although doctors were sometimes called upon when aristocratic women gave birth. Blanche of Anjou, the second queen of James II of Aragon, received the attention of physicians during all 10 of her confinements. Nonetheless, she died in 1310 soon after the delivery of a daughter.

A woodcut depicts a woman on a birthing stool. Teams of midwives were often called in to assist at childbirths

Troubled start
An orphaned or abandoned infant is handed into a woman's care at the Santa Maria della Scala hospital in 15th-century Siena

Treat hospital as a last resort

When it came to giving birth in the Middle Ages, there was no place like home

Most medieval women went through labour in a domestic, non-medicalised environment. And, if they were aristocratic and merchant-class, that often meant retiring to a birthing chamber (a darkened room provided with soft furnishings) a month before they expected to give birth.

While the birthing room was very much a women's domain, attended by female friends and relatives and midwives, men were still heavily invested in childbirth, especially since the continuation of the family line was at stake. While pregnant in 1441, the Norfolk woman Margaret Paston asked her husband to wear a protective ring that she had sent him, thereby implicating him in her safe

WELLCOME COLLECTION

pregnancy and delivery.

In sharp contrast to today, hospitals were very much a last resort for women in labour. Medieval hospitals were charitable institutions for the sick poor, and fittingly it was women in unstable domestic situations who found themselves in hospital birth wards. Unmarried mothers were especially in need of hospital care. Their precarious social situation meant that their infants were often abandoned and needed to be fed by wet nurses at foundling hospitals.

One such institution, the Santa Maria della Scala in Florence, had a turning box in the wall where babies could be left anonymously (the box was then turned and the baby taken into the hospital). It also had beds for wet nurses, and sent infants out to a network of wet nurses in the countryside.

Patients in birthing wards still had access to the knowledge of midwives. And by the end of their careers, these midwives must have had great experience not only of childbirth but also the social difficulties faced by the poorer women that they assisted.

SUPERSTOCK/BRIDGEMAN

Don't place all your faith in medicine

Official medical advice was in short supply, so women often turned to magico-religious remedies

Childbirth was, initially at least, the Cinderella of medieval medicine. While there was official guidance available to women suffering with gynaecological problems, or those needing help with fertility, expert advice on giving birth was far harder to find. In the Middle Ages, having a baby was seen as a natural process rather than a medical problem, and hence did not require the in-depth application of medical theory. And, since physicians tended not to build up practical experience by attending deliveries, it was difficult for them to write about childbirth.

But medical writers didn't entirely pass over the subject. The *Trotula*, the principal text on women's health that circulated from the 12th century, addressed complications in childbirth, discussing for example how to stitch a tear between the vagina and the anus "in three or four places with a silk thread".

Another learned text, compiled by the physician Aldobrandino of Siena in the 13th century, advised that two or three weeks before the birth the mother should bathe in water steeped with herbs and lubricate her legs, thighs and vagina with camomile oil and chicken fat, no doubt to ease the delivery. However, Aldobrandino could not offer a medical solution if the child presented in the wrong position, only suggesting that the midwife should manually turn the infant in the womb. Aldobrandino probably had the high-stakes reproductive health of a specific group of women in mind, since he was personal physician to Beatrice of Savoy, Countess of Provence, who had four daughters, all of whom became queens through marriage and thus needed to produce healthy heirs.

By the later Middle Ages, more written sources of advice were available, especially in medical recipes. One English manuscript from the 15th century mixes herbal and magico-religious remedies intended to bring about a safe delivery. The labouring woman is advised to drink hyssop (a herb of the mint family) in hot water, and wine or water that has washed a bowl on which a pater noster prayer is written.

A woman consults a physician in the 13th century. One manuscript advised labouring women to take a drink infused with the power of a prayer

Be prepared for the worst

No two deliveries were the same. Luckily, medieval midwives had a plan for all eventualities

It's easy to imagine childbirth as a harrowing experience for a medieval woman, with little access to pain relief, or control over what was happening to her. However, the birthing chamber was well-equipped and midwives had the expertise to ensure a smooth delivery and to intervene when complications arose. One approach to labour was to seat the pregnant woman on a birthing stool; another scenario was for her to pull on a rope. Aldobrandino of Siena advised: "If she is fat, let her lie on her stomach and draw up her knees towards her head, and place a cushion under her belly."

Certain fossils were understood to ease pain in childbirth, and a stone known as the eaglestone was attached to the labouring woman's thigh, since Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions understood that it would expedite the birth.

Of course, not all pregnancies ended happily: a fast delivery was considered especially important when the foetus was believed to have died, and many medical recipes existed for this difficult situation. An Anglo-Saxon text prescribed a herbal drink including pennyroyal, a plant that was also used in abortive remedies for its ability to cause the lining of the uterus to shed.

Midwives also needed to be prepared to take action if the mother died but the infant was still living. In these instances a Caesarean section could be performed, either by the midwife or by a surgeon called in to intervene. Following the delivery of a living infant, the umbilical cord was cut and tied with a soft woollen thread and the child was immediately swaddled. This practice was intended to maintain the warm environment of the womb and to support and protect the baby's flexible limbs. A bed was provided for the infant, ranging from a cradle to a simple basket.

The plant pennyroyal was sometimes prescribed when a pregnancy had ended in tragedy

Surgeons and midwives were able to perform a Caesarean section – as shown in a 15th-century manuscript – in cases where the mother had died

Seek help from the heavens

It was widely believed that the success, or otherwise, of a pregnancy was in the gift of the saints

While official medical guidance on pregnancy may have been hard to come by, divine assistance (or at least the promise of it) certainly wasn't. Our medieval predecessors believed that several saints supported a safe pregnancy and birth. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the majority of these saints were female, and the most prominent of them all were the Virgin Mary and St Margaret. In late medieval England, however, a lesser known saint, Julitta, was also widely venerated, alongside her son Quiricus.

Julitta and Quiricus were jointly martyred, symbolising the holiness of the relationship between mother and child. This pair of saints, alongside the Virgin and other holy figures, featured on birth girdles, long parchment scrolls that were intended to come into contact with the mother's body, whether wrapped around the abdomen or carried in a rolled up form.

Girdles were similar to relics – the idea being that a material object connected to a saint was imbued with beneficial powers. They also included magical features such as protective verbal remedies or charms. In the run-up to the birth of her seventh or eighth child, Elizabeth of York, the queen of King Henry VII of England, paid a monk for bringing a girdle of the Virgin to her. She also visited a monastery at Hampton Court, no doubt to gain further divine protection. Sadly,

It was believed that if a woman in labour laid this image of a cross, red heart and shield on her womb, both mother and child would survive

she died after the delivery in February 1503, as did her infant daughter.

Girdles and other devotional artefacts, such as small statues of saints, were used by less affluent women as well as the elite, and even objects that did not have any religious associations were valued in connection with childbirth. In the 12th century, following a difficult delivery that she and her baby son survived, the Empress Matilda, daughter of the English king Henry I, gratefully donated the silk mattress on which she lay during her illness for the benefit of leprosy sufferers. As well as being a luxury item connected to a royal figure, this mattress was now associated with comfort, reassurance and healing.

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This 15th-century illumination shows a mother with her newborn child. This was a period of feasting and celebration – but also great danger

Rejoice – but don't relax

Following the birth, many mothers spent weeks in enforced confinement, rebuilding their strength

Statistics paint a bleak picture of childbirth and infancy in medieval Europe. In 1420s Florence, giving birth was responsible for about one in five of all deaths of married women, while archaeological evidence from medieval Wharram Percy in North Yorkshire indicates that 19 per cent of infants died before the age of two.

There's no single reason for this terrible death toll but one of the chief culprits was infection. A major cause of infection for the mother was the retention of the placenta. A miracle story of St Thomas Becket recorded in the 1170s tells how Herbert of Felton's wife was deeply afflicted because only part of the afterbirth had been released from her body. She needed the saint's assistance to alleviate pains and breathing problems caused by the retained matter.

After the birth, the vulnerable infant was furnished with objects believed to have protective powers, such as coral and amber amulets. The mother remained within the birthing chamber for four to six weeks for a period of confinement which prevented her from rejoining her community but allowed her to rest and regain her strength. This was part of a cleansing process that reflected the belief that the mother's body was made impure by childbirth, much as a woman was understood to be contaminated during menstruation.

After her long period of confinement, the mother was ritually accepted back into the parish church. She met the priest in the porch to be sprinkled with holy water, then made an offering and received mass. This rite was known as "churching".

Although churching restricted the mother's freedom of movement, it also provided opportunities for feasting and celebration, within both the birthing chamber and the wider parish community. In fact, so woven was this rite into the fabric of medieval life that women in northern Europe opposed efforts to bring it to an end during the Reformation. Churching may well have bolstered negative stereotypes about women but it also reinforced their identities as mothers – and that was something they clearly valued. H

Dr Elma Brenner is Wellcome Collection's medieval specialist. She is co-editor of *Leprosy and Identity in the Middle Ages: From England to the Mediterranean* (Manchester University Press, forthcoming 2021)

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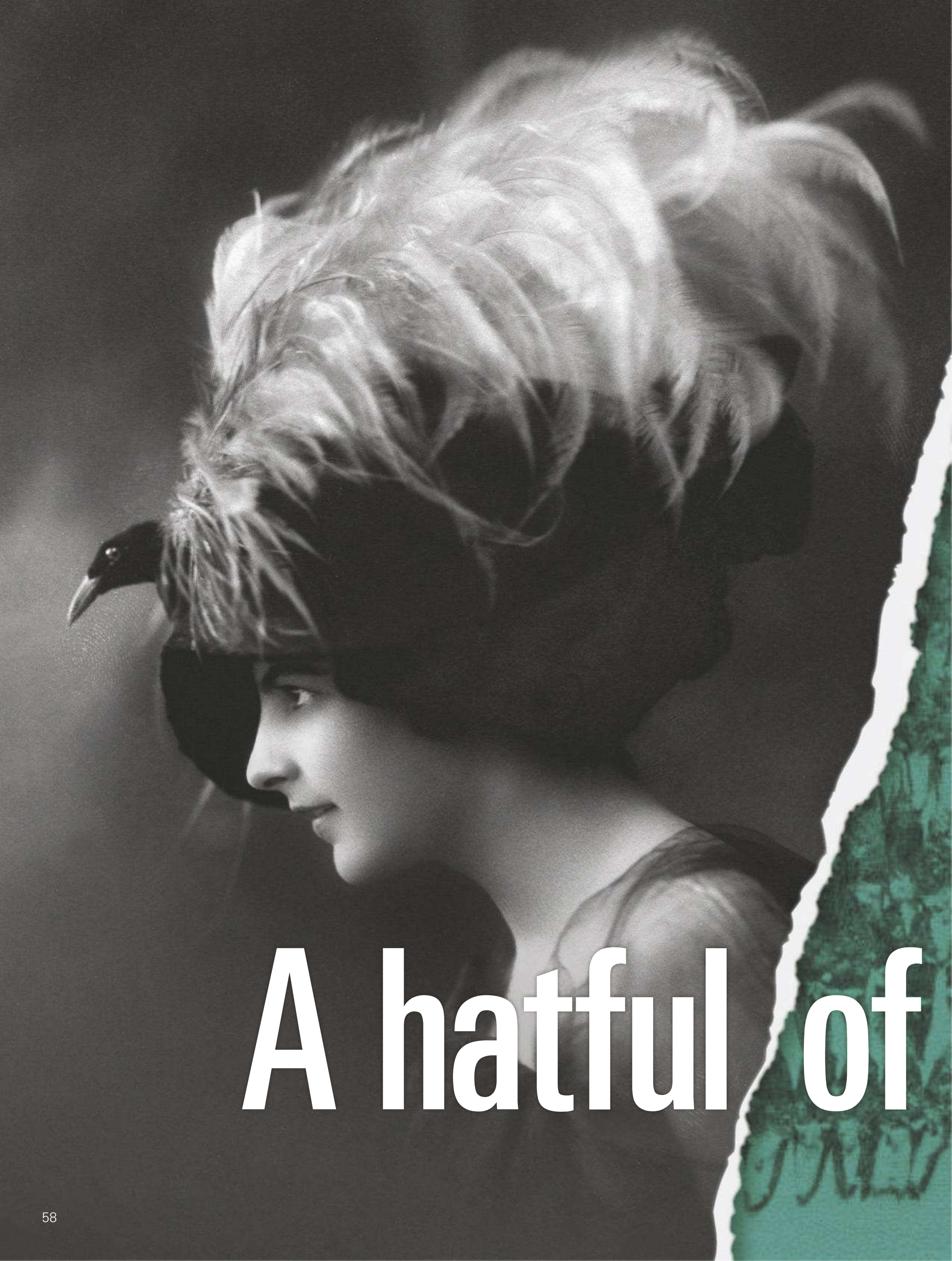
A hatful of

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horrors

Dark side of fashion

LEFT: A 1910 portrait of a woman wearing a hat adorned with ostrich plumes and a stuffed bird. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, owning hats like this was a sign of status for many women
RIGHT: Stacks of hummingbird skins at a millinery sale in 1912. The vogue for hats decorated with plumes and skins led to the slaughter of millions of birds

From the magnificent ostrich plumes worn by Parisian socialites to the stuffed birds that sat atop high-class heads in New York, the fashion for feathered hats peaked in the Victorian era. But, as **Malcolm Smith** reports, it came at a terrible cost

The jeering Parisian crowds lining the route to the guillotine were all too aware that the plain white, ugly mobcap Marie Antoinette was forced to wear for her execution was designed to mock her excesses. When she had become queen in 1774, she had rebelled against the traditional dress style of the French court, ordering the latest, more provocative styles – including hairpieces topped off with large arrays of feathers – from Rose Bertin, who became a leading French milliner and dressmaker.

A mountain of powdered hair piled high and finished with a large panache of ostrich and other feathers (as seen below, in this 1778 portrait of Marie Antoinette) set a fashion trend and projected extreme extravagance, when many French people endured terrible shortages.

Marie Antoinette may have picked precisely the wrong time to flaunt her passion for outrageous headwear, but that didn't stop Paris fashion – flamboyant, feather-bedecked hats in particular – becoming the envy of women of means across Europe and America. Not that the new flamboyance was welcomed by everyone. At first, the English aristocracy claimed to be shocked. To Lady Charlotte Bury, a novelist, noted beauty and delight of the highest circles of London Society, "the ugliest part of the habillements [attire] is the high chimneys on their heads, which… are covered with feathers".

Nevertheless, English society, and Lady Charlotte, were soon persuaded. Feathers – mainly ostrich, pheasant and peacock for plumes, and marabou (the feathers of adjutant storks found in parts of Africa) for trimmings – adorned wide-brimmed hats set atop hair piled high. It was fashion in the extreme. And it was unbelievably popular.

Mayan macaws

But this use of feathers and whole stuffed birds for head adornment and hat decor long predated Marie Antoinette. The Mayan civilisation of the Americas used the feathers of a variety of birds – especially brilliantly coloured quetzals and parrots such as macaws – to decorate headdresses worn by the elite of their society. New Guinea tribesmen have been wearing headdresses of stunning arrays of birds of paradise feathers for many thousands of years, while the Plains Indian headdresses of eagle feathers worn by tribes such as the Sioux, Crow and Blackfoot were of huge spiritual and political importance for millennia.

Henry VIII wore a flamboyant panache of four-foot-long feathers when he majestically rode into Boulogne

In Europe, feathers first became common as a hat decoration in the early 14th century. During the 16th century, hats adorned with ostrich feathers were in demand by those wealthy enough to purchase them in the fashion centres of Europe: Paris, Vienna, Florence and Prague. Wealthy ladies, courtiers and high-ranking military officers wore them too.

A famous panache of feathers, comprising no fewer than eight plumes, each over four feet long, was worn by the ever flamboyant King Henry VIII when he rode majestically into Boulogne, his forces having seized it from the French in September 1544. They were probably the tail feathers of a species of Indian peafowl.

This kind of panache, usually comprising naturally white or black ostrich feathers – but sometimes dyed in other colours – atop an officer's hat was deemed to have a practical function as well, and was not simply an adornment. It made the wearer much more visually obvious to his soldiers. Before the battle of Ivry in Normandy in 1590, King Henry IV of France commanded his leaders "not to lose sight of his white panache, that it would lead them to victory and honour". His forces won the battle, thanks to his panache or otherwise.

The ostriches whose magnificent feathers were used to make these panaches originally inhabited virtually all of north Africa, much of eastern and southern Africa, the Arabian peninsula and large parts of the Middle East. They had always been hunted for food, but once a market developed in Europe for their feathers to adorn hats, the killing was stepped up. Chased on horseback until they were exhausted, or shot, their populations were soon being depleted. In 1807, an estimated 509 kilos of ostrich feathers were imported into France alone. By 1850, they had been reduced to near

Deadly price

TOP: A woman wears a hat topped with egrets' white breeding plumes in 1911. Such hats were hugely popular among wealthy Victorian and Edwardian ladies
BOTTOM: An egret stands in water. The birds were killed in their millions for their delicate breeding feathers, which sold for eye-watering amounts

An 1890 advert for feathered hats from Bon Marché. The arrival of department stores caused the feather trade to skyrocket

ALAMY/AKG-IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

All but annihilated

TOP: Ostrich feathers are piled high in London's Cutler Street warehouses in c1896. By the end of the century, wild ostriches faced extinction in north Africa
BOTTOM: Victorian actress Stella Gastelle wears a hat stuffed with ostrich feathers in 1899. Hats like this were the envy of women across Europe and America

BRIDGEMAN/MARY EVANS

extinction across the Arabian peninsula; they had all but disappeared from north Africa before the 19th century was out.

In fact, the killing only slowed when the first ostrich farms were set up in the southern cape of South Africa in the 1860s. After that, feathers from farmed ostriches dominated the trade – and saved the wild ostrich from certain extinction.

Snow-white plumes

By 1600 the feathers of more exotic birds were appearing in Europe: incredibly colourful bird of paradise skins from New Guinea; parrot feathers from South America; and the snow-white, gossamer-fine breeding plumes of egrets from southern Asia and the Americas which, by 1914, were worth up to 28 times the equivalent weight of silver. There are no accurate records of the numbers of wild egrets killed worldwide; estimates for how many little egrets were supplied annually for millinery alone vary between 5 and 200 million. Only in recent decades have their numbers recovered.

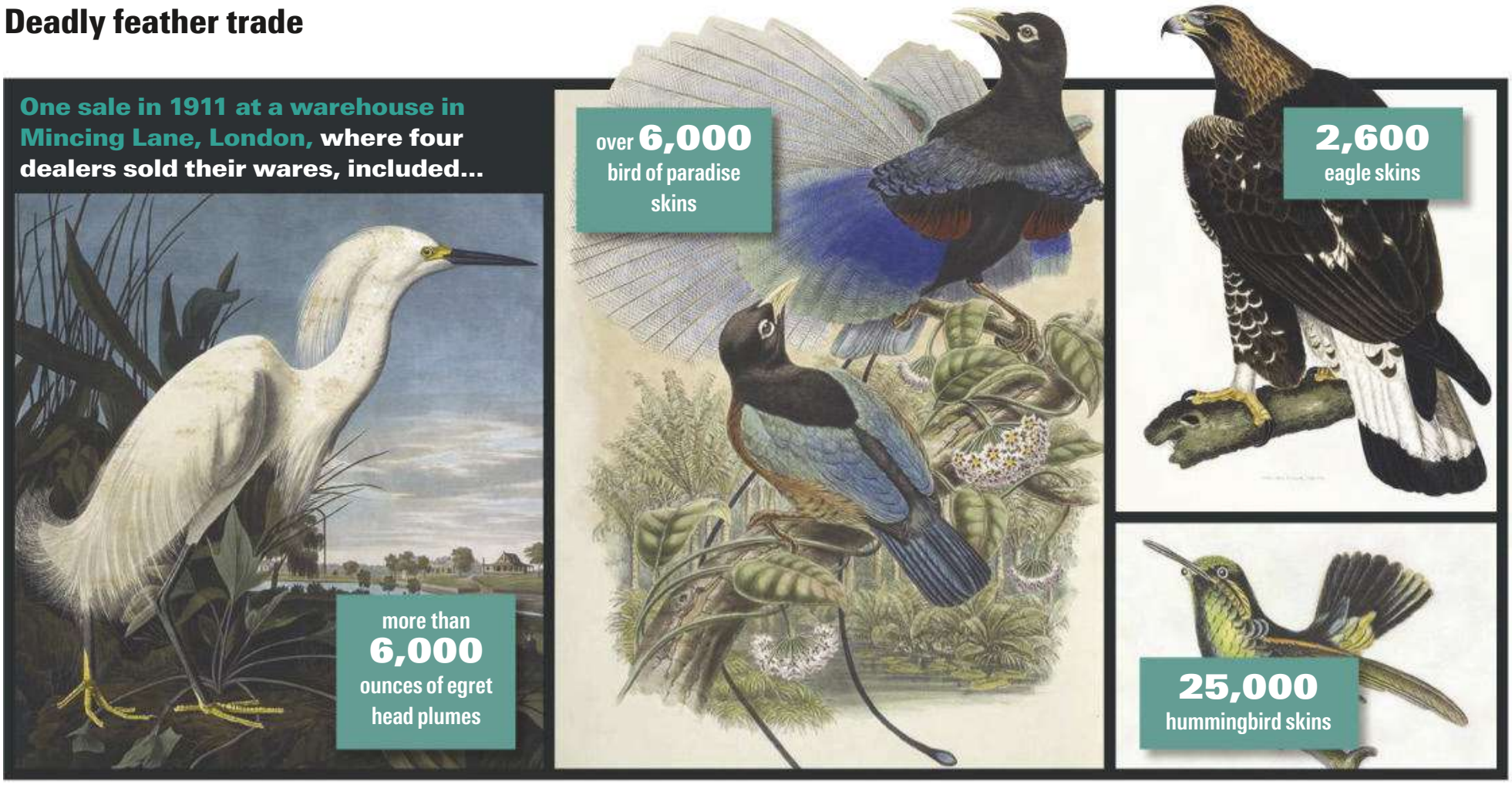
Feathers of some British birds were sought after, too. Great crested grebes, attractive common birds of lakes and reservoirs, were shot for their chestnut-brown ear feather tufts, known in the trade as "tippet". Their slaughter began in the second half of the 19th century and reduced them to just 42 pairs in nine years. Seabirds – in particular sea-cliff breeding kittiwakes – were persecuted too. The black-marked white wings of these small gulls were popular for decorating fashionable ladies' headwear.

Gradually, hats adorned with exotic feathers were no longer the preserve of the wealthy. From the mid-19th century, the catalogues of the large department stores that had begun to spring up brought a huge variety of hats to a much wider clientele; before this, they had sported hats made of rabbit fur or even wool. In France it was Bon Marché and Galeries Lafayette; in London, Whiteleys was followed by Peter Robinson, Liberty and Harrods.

Unsurprisingly, the trade burgeoned. In the first quarter of 1885, 750,000 egret skins were sold at London auctions, and in 1887 a single London dealer handled 2 million of them. The city cornered the international feather market, and buyers came from across Europe and from the US to view and buy stock. Nearly 40 million pounds' weight (more than 18,000 tonnes) of plumage and bird skins, excluding ostrich feathers, was imported into the UK between 1870 and 1920. Maybe 200 million birds a year were being killed. At its peak at the end of the 19th century, the feather trade was worth £20m a year to Britain.

WH Hudson, an author, naturalist and leading British ornithologist of his day, recoiled with horror as he witnessed one sale of 80,000 parrot skins and 1,700 skins of

Deadly feather trade


One sale in 1911 at a warehouse in Mincing Lane, London, where four dealers sold their wares, included...
more than 6,000 ounces of egret head plumes
over 6,000 bird of paradise skins
2,600 eagle skins
25,000 hummingbird skins

birds of paradise late in 1897. "Spread out in Trafalgar Square they would have covered a large proportion of that space with a grass-green carpet, flecked with vivid purple, rose and scarlet," he commented.

By the mid-19th century, feather-embellished hats were the height of fashion in US cities too. Sometime in 1886, Frank Chapman, a leading American ornithologist, took two afternoon walks to record the birds he spotted in New York's uptown shopping districts. Three-quarters of the 700 ladies' hats he saw were decorated with whole stuffed birds, sometimes several on one hat, or were adorned with their feathers. He counted 40 different species. With no legal protection, any species – American or imported – could be killed.

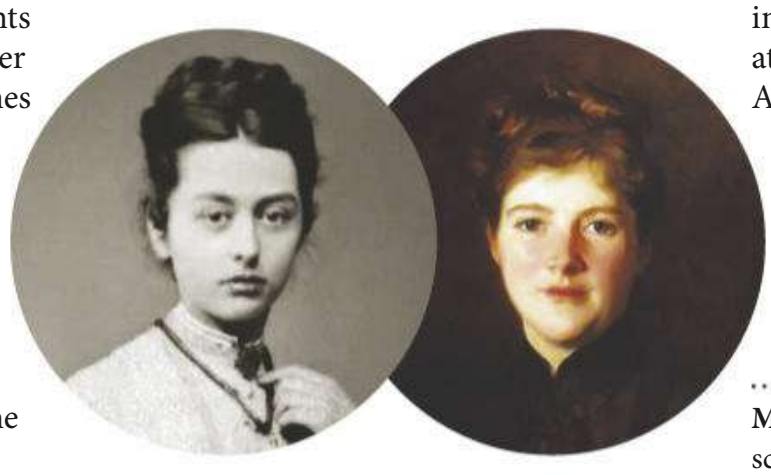
In the US, whole colonies of tree-breeding egrets and herons were soon shot out, their exquisite breeding plumes cut off and the birds left to rot, their eggs and starving youngsters abandoned. To keep up with demand, plumes had to be imported. The 33,000 pounds of egret plumes recorded as being exported from Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela between 1899 and 1912 represents somewhere around 15 million of the smaller species of egret. In 1903, the price for plumes offered to American hunters was $32 an ounce, twice the value of gold at that time. Later they reached $80 an ounce, the price for increasing rarity as the birds were hunted down.

Ending the carnage

How did the ladies wearing them justify the bird killing? Some wrongly assumed that these were naturally moulted feathers and no birds were killed. Others subscribed to the belief that human "needs" reigned supreme over wild nature. There was also a commonly held and naive view that there was some self-perpetuating abundance of birds, and that more would appear miraculously each year, however many were killed.

Whole colonies of egrets and herons were shot out, their exquisite breeding plumes cut off and the birds left to rot

However, not everyone tolerated this fashion-stimulated carnage. And some were determined to take direct action. For instance, in 1889 Emily Williamson, a well-to-do resident of Didsbury, Manchester, established the Society for the Protection of Birds (SPB). Joining forces with three other women who had set up the Fur and Feather League in Croydon, Surrey, their campaign created the RSPB and led, after many acrimonious exchanges with the trade and its supporters, to legislation banning feather importation in 1921. It had taken more than three decades.



Avian activists Emily Williamson (left, in 1889) and Harriet Hemenway (in 1890) lobbied to ban feather importation in the UK and America, respectively

Across the Atlantic, in 1896 Harriet Hemenway and her cousin Minna Hall started a similar campaign in Boston, Massachusetts. Steadily attracting more and more members, they formed Audubon – today one of the largest bird protection charities in the world – and fought a long, verbal battle with the millinery trade. Although some protective legislation was passed in the US after a few years, the importation of feathers wasn't banned until 1918, when the US Congress passed the Migratory Bird Act.

Fashion, always ephemeral, was changing anyway. By the 1920s, automobiles – a more potent fashion icon than a feather-adorned hat – made it impossible to wear a hat the size of a small coffee table in a car with a hood.

The world was changing, too. With so many families grieving loved ones lost in the First World War, flamboyant, attention-seeking headwear seemed somehow inappropriate. More conservative attire was de rigueur. Although the war had cut off the bulk of feather imports into London, and a tax was imposed on the import of luxury goods, feathers included, it was a human catastrophe – not an animal one – that precipitated a fashion reassessment. H

Malcolm Smith is a biologist, a former chief scientist and former deputy chief executive at the Countryside Council for Wales. His books include *Hats: A Very Unnatural History* (Michigan State University Press, 2020)

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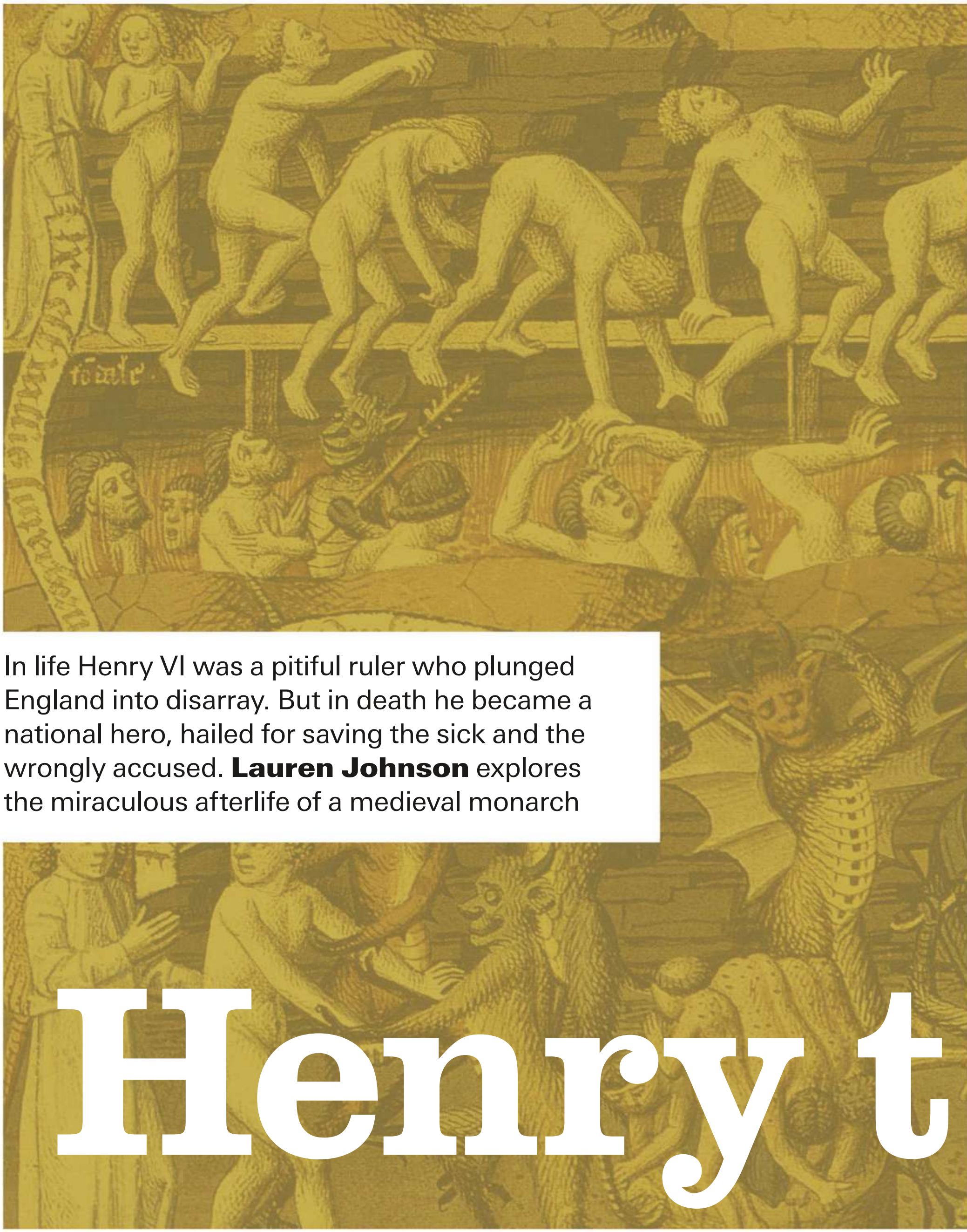


In life Henry VI was a pitiful ruler who plunged England into disarray. But in death he became a national hero, hailed for saving the sick and the wrongly accused. **Lauren Johnson** explores the miraculous afterlife of a medieval monarch

Henry t

Incorruptible king
A c1520–40 portrait of Henry VI in front of a 15th-century depiction of hell. Between 1481 and 1500, the dead king was credited with more than 300 miracles, from bringing plague victims back to life to helping condemned men cheat the hangman's noose

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

he holy

n 7 February 1486, Alice Newnett of Mere in Wiltshire was raised from the dead. She had been the latest victim of a virulent plague sweeping through England – a sickness so fast-acting that the priest who had been called to give her Extreme Unction (the final anointing administered to the dying) arrived to find she was already almost lifeless. Before he finished the last rites, Alice apparently expired. The priest hurriedly made his last anointings and commanded the women present to lay Alice out for burial while he arranged her gravesite. (In cases of plague, it was best to bury the dead swiftly, to prevent infection spreading.)

Alice's body was laid on the ground and, sorrowfully, her mother sewed the girl into her shroud. There the corpse lay for two hours. But then, as evening drew near, Alice suddenly sat bolt upright inside her shroud. The priest had been too hasty. She was not dead after all. Indeed, on closer inspection it was discovered that all signs of plague had disappeared from her body.

As she explained to her marvelling mother, Alice knew the cause of her resurrection. While she had lain still, she had received a vision of a holy man wearing dark silk and a golden crown, who promised to restore her to life on two conditions: one, that she lay in her shroud until he told her to rise; the other, that she make a wax candle as tall as she was and deliver it to the tomb of King Henry VI at Windsor Chapel. Alice's surprising saviour was apparently none other than the late King Henry himself, a man who had now been dead for 15 years.

There Alice's corpse lay for two hours, until she sat bold upright, brought back to life by the dead king

Chains and nooses

Just as Alice had been directed in her vision, she took a large wax candle to the Chapel of St George in Windsor, and there it nestled among an array of votive offerings from others who believed that "Holy King Henry" had saved their life or livelihood. Chains and nooses hung over the tomb, left by wrongfully condemned prisoners who had been saved from imprisonment or death by hanging thanks to the mystical appearance of King Henry VI, sometimes flanked by angels or the Virgin Mary. In some cases, it was claimed, Henry had slipped his hand between the hanging man's neck and the noose to prevent him suffocating.

A smeared knife on the tomb was testament to what was believed to be another miraculous resurrection: the servant Helen Barker had used the blade to slit her throat "from ear to ear" after being falsely accused of theft by her employer, a London soap-boiler. Repenting after the fact, Helen asked for Henry's prayers and within 20 days was, it was claimed, fully recovered.

Not all the offerings testified to quite such dramatic miracles. A silver ear had been placed on the tomb by a Devonshire man who had lived for 37 years with a bean in his ear, which only prayer to Henry had released. More than one set of crutches were left by the lamed and sickly whose ailments Henry had apparently healed, enabling them to walk to Windsor on their own two feet. In some cases, thanksgiving was merely for the return of runaway pigs.

These offerings were tended to by the canons of St George's Chapel, who assiduously recorded the miracles that grateful supplicants came to report at Henry's tomb. Between 1481 and 1500, more than 300 miracles were ascribed to his agency – an extraordinary success rate for a king who had, in life, been a singular failure.

Beaten man Edward IV captures Henry VI after the battle of Northampton in a c1460–70 manuscript. Henry died as Edward's captive but continued to plague his adversary from beyond the grave
TOP LEFT: Henry VI shown in an initial in a contemporary manuscript

BRIDGEMAN

Catastrophic collapse

Henry VI of the House of Lancaster had inherited the English and French thrones before his first birthday in 1422. His father was the great warrior, Henry V, but Henry VI proved a very different character. Zealously committed to peace, Henry lacked the worldliness or willpower to put his good intentions into effect. His ham-fisted attempts to end the Hundred Years' War by marriage – or treaty, or release of prisoners, or cession of land – all failed spectacularly, and within 30 years of inheriting France he had lost everything except a sliver of land around Calais.

In England, rebellion and bloody civil war followed. Henry VI suffered a catastrophic mental collapse – what we might term today a psychotic break – and for 16 months was unresponsive and apparently incapable of physical or mental activity. He may never have fully recovered.

During the Wars of the Roses with his Yorkist dynastic rivals, Henry had the dubious distinction of being deposed twice – on both occasions by Edward IV of York, a man cut from a very different cloth. Edward was militarily minded, charming, sexually alluring and possessed the innate steeliness that Henry lacked. In May 1471, after crushing Henry's Lancastrian followers during the battle of Tewkesbury, Edward had his rival secretly put to death in the Tower of London. By then, Henry had been Edward's prisoner, on and off, for six years.

Having processed Henry's corpse through the streets of London "open visaged" (ie with his face open to inspection), Edward had him buried in a quiet little monastery up the river Thames at Chertsey. He also released an exculpating document that insisted the late Lancastrian king had died "of pure displeasure and melancholy". Edward hoped this would lay the ghost of Henry to rest – instead, the king continued to trouble the Yorkist regime from beyond the grave.

As if expressing divine displeasure with Edward, the following years were marred by plague. Pestilence swept through the kingdom, driving the English out of their cities and onto the roads towards holy shrines, where they prayed for deliverance from one fatal scourge after another. The first outbreak of plague appeared within four months of Henry's death. In autumn 1471, plague killed a fifth of the adult population of East Anglia.

After so many years of political turmoil, the recurrence of sickness fed an underlying sense of instability and vulnerability. In their time of need, the English began to pray to the

Undying devotion

Henry VI is invoked as a saint – surrounded by his adoring followers and objects left at his tomb – as depicted in a woodcut from a Bible in the Royal Collection. The image shows: 1 The king himself, holding a sceptre and orb. 2 A wax figurine of a sailor wounded in the guts by a cannonball, who was saved after praying to Henry for salvation. 3 This could be Richard Beys or Thomas Fuller, both wrongly condemned men whom the king saved from the hangman's noose. 4 An antelope, a heraldic symbol of the Lancastrian dynasty to which Henry belonged. 5 Helen Barker, a servant who Henry brought back from the dead after she slit her throat (see page 66). 6 A wax image of a ship which, despite running aground off Norfolk, made it all the way to London after its crew prayed to Henry for assistance

CULT FIGURES

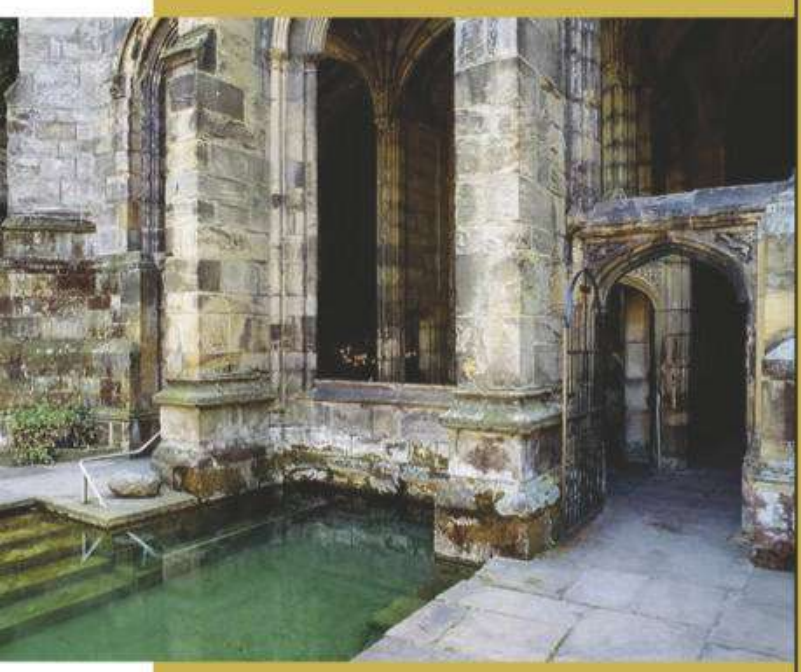
Three other medieval miracle-workers who attracted devoted followings

1 THE NUN WHO SPRANG TO LIFE

St Gwenfrewi's brutal death – and remarkable afterlife – made her a popular saint in England and Wales. A seventh-century nun from Tegeingl (now Flintshire), St Gwenfrewi was educated to a high standard by her patron St Beuno. Despite her vow of virginity, a local prince called Caradog ab Alog demanded sexual favours from her, and when Gwenfrewi tried to flee towards her church, Caradog overtook her and beheaded her with his sword. Miraculously, a spring bubbled up in the place her head fell. Even more miraculously, Beuno rejoined her head and body, restoring Gwenfrewi to life. Caradog was killed with a curse.

After her "first death", Gwenfrewi went on pilgrimage to Rome and later settled as an abbess of nuns at Gwytherin, where she died for a second time. Five hundred years later, she was still sufficiently celebrated that her remains were removed to Shrewsbury Abbey. The hallowed spring where she had first died became known as Ffynnon Gwenfrewi, or "Holywell", and was a popular site of pilgrimage for centuries, said to have curative powers for all manner of ailments.

In 1483, William Caxton printed Gwenfrewi's biography. As late as the 16th century, poems were composed in Gwenfrewi's honour and religious buildings were constructed at Holywell. The site can still be visited today.



The healing well and bathing pool at St Winifred's Chapel in Holywell at the spot where Gwenfrewi is said to have lost – and regained – her head

Claims that John Schorn could conjure the Devil into a boot – as shown in the Church of St Helen, Gateley – caught Edward IV's attention

2 THE MAN WHO KEPT THE DEVIL IN A BOOT

Henry VI shared the attentions of Windsor pilgrims with another popular saint whose body was translated there in the 15th century: **John Schorn, a Buckinghamshire vicar** famous for catching the Devil in his boot. This boot would be produced during John's sermons, to the mingled amazement and horror of his parishioners, who could glance inside at the Devil.

Schorn's other chief claim to popularity was that during a local drought, he had produced a perpetual spring by striking the ground with his staff. The spring, laden with gypsum, epsom salts and carbonic acid, had healing properties, particularly for those suffering from eye conditions and rheumatism. After his death in c1314, both the spring and Schorn's tomb at North Marston became a popular resort for pilgrims – so popular that a later vicar dug up a skull from the graveyard, sprinkled it with blood and exhibited it as Schorn's head.

In 1478, as Edward IV undertook extensive building work to the chapel at Windsor, Schorn's corpse was moved to a new shrine there, in the hope that the newly constructed tomb would be a money-spinner with pilgrim visitors.

3 THE ANGEL OF THE NORTH

In his lifetime, **Archbishop Richard Scrope** had been a thorn in the side of Henry VI's Lancastrian forebears. The northerner had joined the doomed Percy uprising against Henry IV in 1405 and, on being captured, became the first English bishop to be executed after trial. He was beheaded on royal orders outside York, allegedly by five blows of the axe (representing the five wounds of Christ).

Viewed by many northerners as a martyr, Scope was buried inside York Minster, where his tomb was swiftly the site of several miracles. Within a year, his cult had grown so popular that Henry IV ordered Scrope's tomb to be cordoned off with high log barriers.

A popular myth claimed that Henry IV was struck down with leprosy as divine punishment for killing Scrope. During the Wars of the Roses, Scrope was held up as a champion of anti-Lancastrianism, and Edward IV tried to secure his canonisation. Ironically, it was probably Yorkist victories in the wars that ended Scrope's cult. His veneration seemed superfluous in an age of Yorkist ascendancy.

A devotee genuflects before Archbishop Richard Scrope, who, it was claimed, inspired numerous miracles shortly after his "martyrdom" at the hands of Henry IV

ALAMY/BRIDGEMAN

man who until recently had been their king – now conveniently positioned in the afterlife, where he could more readily intercede on their behalf to God.

Henry had always been a man who inspired sympathy and a peculiar sort of paternalistic care in those who met him. After his death, memories of his good intentions, his concern for children, his heartfelt desire for peace and his renowned piety scrubbed away the recollections of his personal inadequacies as a ruler.

Combined with stories of his suffering – his deposition, exile, imprisonment and violent death – Henry gained a reputation as a man who had been too good for this corrupt world. This concept of the late king as a holy innocent was most clearly expressed in a biography written by his confessor, John Blacman, in the 1480s. Blacman insisted that Henry had eschewed magnificence and experienced mystical visions – both stories of questionable veracity that nonetheless fed an appetite for an image of "Holy King Henry" that helped promote his cult.

Embarrassingly for the Yorkist regime, among the earliest devotees of Henry's cult was their namesake city of York. Within a year or two of Henry's death, an image of him had been placed in York Minster and was already receiving offerings. The archbishop of York received a royal directive to ban this veneration, but to no avail.

The cult of Henry VI spread far and wide, with shrines appearing everywhere, from rural churches in Norfolk and Northumberland to major cathedrals including Hereford and Durham. Pilgrim badges began to be cast in metal, showing Henry clasping his orb and sceptre and occasionally bestride an antelope, the symbol of the Lancastrian dynasty. The badges were carried from Chertsey back into the shires, and then on to ports like London, King's Lynn and Southampton – even to Rouen, across the Channel. Nearly 400 such badges associated with Henry still survive.

Relics connected to the late king also started proliferating. At Bridgnorth in Shropshire, Henry's coat was displayed to visiting pilgrims, while the Lady Chapel on the bridge at Caversham near Reading boasted the blade with which Henry was allegedly murdered, "sheath and all". (Caversham held a veritable ossuary of the holy, having assembled a jawbone of St Æthelmold, St Anastasius's hand and an angel with one wing.) Windsor Chapel exceeded them all, however, with a pair of Henry's spurs, a chip from his bedstead and his red velvet hat, described as "a sovereign medicine against headache".

By 1484, in the reign of the second Yorkist king, Richard III, Henry's cult had grown to unprecedented levels of popularity. Richard

MUSEUM OF LONDON

Holy innocent Pewter badges of Henry VI – like this one, showing the king holding an orb and sceptre, with a heraldic antelope at his feet – have been found everywhere from King's Lynn to Rouen

attempted to control – and benefit from – the rising tide of pilgrims by transporting Henry's body from Chertsey to the Yorkist dynasty's chivalric mausoleum at Windsor, where Edward IV was himself buried.

On Henry's tomb being opened 13 years after death, it was discovered that his corpse was uncorrupted and sweet-smelling (it was believed that God could intervene to prevent the decomposition of saints). To facilitate the reburial, Henry was dismembered and placed in a small lead coffer, but not all of him made it to Windsor. At some point during this transfer, Henry's right arm was stolen, presumably as a relic, and replaced in the coffin with the left humerus of a pig. The switch was not discovered until Henry's tomb was reopened in 1910 – where Henry's arm ended up remains a mystery.

Mad, imprisoned, dead

Under the Tudors, interest in Henry's cult intensified, spurred by the fact that the new king, Henry VII, was the nephew and namesake of his Lancastrian forebear. Henry VII made repeated appeals to the pope to have his uncle canonised, and he even planned to move the corpse again, to Westminster Abbey, to lie close to his own tomb.

By then, Henry's cult had grown into one of the most successful of the Middle Ages. Perhaps this was because Henry was undiscriminating in who he helped. Epileptic nuns, children choking on fish bones, farmers struck by lightning, those afflicted with scrofula – the mad, the imprisoned, the dead.

Thirteen years after his death, Henry's corpse remained uncorrupted and sweet-smelling

All were healed by his intercession. A high preponderance of dead children were brought back to life by Henry, cementing an association between the king and the young that had begun when he founded Eton and King's College, Cambridge in the 1440s. Now he rescued children who fell on pitchforks or were crushed beneath woodpiles.

Unsurprisingly in an era that endured new and devastating forms of pandemic, Henry was also associated with mystical cures. Surviving prayers, including a book of Dublin provenance, plead for him to preserve the orator from epidemics, while on a Devon rood screen he was painted beside the plague saints Sebastian and Roch. Little wonder his cult was promoted by Margaret Beaufort, Henry VII's mother and matriarch of the Tudor dynasty – a woman deservedly paranoid about pestilence. (Her husband, Edmund Tudor, had died of plague while she was pregnant with the future Henry VII.)

Ultimately, however, despite the widespread popularity of Henry VI's cult, he was never canonised as a saint. Throughout the Middle Ages the papacy was uneasy with the beatification of murdered laymen, and they resisted Henry VII's fervent efforts.

Ultimately it was the Tudors who destroyed any chance of sainthood. The religious changes of Henry VIII in the 1530s entailed the widespread destruction of pilgrims' shrines, including Henry VI's. The reliquary at Caversham was dispersed, and Henry's exact burial place in Windsor was lost to memory for centuries. As late as 1543, however, pilgrims still travelled from Cornwall and Devon to surreptitiously visit his tomb. And still, today, a wrought-iron money box stands beside the plain stone tomb of Henry VI – a last testament to the hundreds of pilgrims who had deposited their coins in thanksgiving to "Holy King Henry". H

Lauren Johnson is a historian and writer. Her books include *Shadow King: The Life and Death of Henry VI* (Head of Zeus, 2019). She discussed Henry VI in a 2019 episode of our podcast: *historyextra.com/podcast*

How to be a medieval artist or Tudor scribe

From running historical martial arts classes to recreating 16th-century costumes, four people tell us how their education helped them pursue unusual, and highly rewarding, jobs in history

"In one week I'm a Tudor scribe, Florence Nightingale, the wife of a Roman legate, and a Stuart seamstress"

Fiona Charlesworth
Teacher for History Off the Page

I have a degree in history from Cardiff University and a PGCE in secondary-level history from the University of Cambridge. Now I work as a teacher for History Off the Page. This company brings history to life for primary-aged children, by developing and delivering immersive in-school days using a mixture of storytelling, craft activities, role play, investigation tasks and drama activities. Our days are educational, fun and memorable, covering a wide range of topics. In one week I might be a Tudor scribe, an ancient Greek, Florence Nightingale, the wife of a Roman legate, and a Stuart seamstress!

Without my PGCE I could not have applied to work as a teacher for History Off the Page. My colleagues are all exceptionally skilled primary teachers with a wide range of specialisms. Applying for the role with a history degree and history teaching qualification meant I had something different to contribute to, and strengthen, the team. As a result, my history education has been invaluable in my job.

Having that chronological time frame in my head, and general understanding of key events in British history, has given me great confidence. The children I work with often ask amazing questions, not necessarily related to the topic we are covering, but I can usually offer a considered answer. I also make a lot of use of the research skills I developed while at university. A number of topics we cover are outside of those that I studied or taught as a class teacher, requiring a lot of research.

During the pandemic, I have helped create virtual days on the Romans and life on the home front in the Second World War. I really enjoyed researching these topics, finding interesting bits of information that I thought would bring authenticity to these days and that would appeal to children who like quirky and real details. For example, one gem I discovered concerns the bombing of the Roses lime juice factory in St Albans; for weeks afterwards the puddles smelled of lime. I thought children would love that image.

Fiona Charlesworth dressed as a Tudor scribe. Her job sees her take on a number of historical characters

"We can now say with confidence how people used a wide variety of weapons in the late medieval period"

Matt Easton
Period martial artist and YouTuber

I grew up obsessed with history, particularly the medieval period. At school I didn't have the option to study medieval history specifically until A-level, but I had a great teacher and that gave me a fantastic foundation. I initially went to University College London to study architecture, but I transferred to a course that was being run jointly by the history and archaeology departments at UCL. I ended up graduating with a BA(hons) degree in medieval history and archaeology in 2000.

Today, I am a military history YouTuber and antique militaria dealer. I have also been involved with researching period fencing treatises for more than 20 years. As well as publishing on this, I run two historical fencing clubs and teach period martial arts classes.

Studying A-level medieval history gave me a great foundation for my career. My university degree took that deeper and let me specialise in military history. It also taught me how to research more effectively, and how to excite other people with the information – something that's invaluable for my work as a YouTuber. My studies also gave me a good grounding in how to be balanced and analytical. The research resources that were made available to me were second to none at that time, and I made great connections in my chosen field, which remain useful to me today. I still collaborate with people I studied with, some of whom are now archaeologists, museum professionals, educators and in other branches of the heritage sector.

My education continues to help me, as I am always researching and learning. The methods for doing that come from my history education: knowing where to access information, how to unlock new avenues of research, and the best way to analyse and use the information.

For instance, when studying historical fencing treatises for my fencing clubs, I've had to find forgotten source materials in archives; transcribe and translate the texts; and interpret them effectively in their correct historical context. Years of research, learning and experimentation have brought us to a place where we can now say with confidence how people used a wide variety of weapons and armour in the late medieval period onwards – we have revived previously lost historical skills.

Toni Watts recreates an illuminated "D" in historically accurate colours and 24-carat gold. Shells were often used as paint palettes in the medieval era

"It wasn't until my BA, looking at exquisite medieval books, that I wondered how those artists made their colours"

Toni Watts
Manuscript illuminator

I embarked upon my degree, a BA in classical studies and art history, purely for the enjoyment of learning something new. I was working as a professional wildlife artist at the time after a long and enjoyable career as a doctor. Little did I know that this degree was to lead to a new career as a manuscript illuminator. I'm now one of the few people in the UK practising this endangered craft, using techniques dating back to the medieval era.

It seems ridiculous, as an artist, that I had never given any thought to how paint was made. It wasn't until I did my BA, looking at wall paintings in Pompeii and exquisitely decorated medieval books, that I began to wonder how classical and medieval artists made their colours. After all, artists of old couldn't nip down to the local art shop for paint as I had done so many times.

There followed a long period of historical research, helped greatly by my ongoing degree, which taught me where to look and how to critically read published works. I discovered old recipes for transforming minerals and plants into pigments, paint and ink, and thought I ought to make my own. The studio was transformed into a colour laboratory, with bubbling pots of ink and poisonous minerals of various hues. Having made a range of traditional colours, I learned to add gold leaf to vellum and paper, using glues made to 15th-century recipes.

A year as artist in residence at Lincoln Cathedral followed. My association with the cathedral continues, demonstrating how the beautiful manuscripts in the collection were originally made. I now run workshops, passing on my skills both in the UK and internationally – none of which would have been possible if I hadn't embarked on my degree.

"An education in history teaches you to join up the dots and recreate what we think was made in the past"

Meridith Towne
Dress historian and costume maker

I undertook a BA in archaeology at Durham University, followed by a specialist practical short course on making historical costume for the stage at the Northern College of Costume, York.

Now I work as a dress historian and costume maker for the heritage sector. I create costumes to complement exhibitions, facilitate learning within education programmes, and ones that are designed to be worn by staff – helping make properties unique and attractive to visitors.

I am also the costume maker for the Royal Armouries in Leeds, and consult on historical costume. Finally, I help historic sites, libraries and social groups add a unique element to their events by offering lively, informative presentations on women's social history told through fashion, enhanced with an extensive visual display of original clothes from my own private collection.

My education has been of real benefit to my career. By choosing to do an archaeology degree at Durham, I was looking at the past through objects. In some cases, I was looking at it through the *absence* of objects, which is particularly key with textiles, as they rarely survive. An education in history teaches you to join up the dots of what we know to enable us to recreate what we think happened or was made in the past.

Also, the emphasis on presenting my work during my degree made me much more confident. This helped when I made the decision to go straight to freelance upon finishing my education. It also provided the basis for me to develop my presentation skills, which are invaluable for my career today. H

Meridith Towne created these reproductions of 16th-century dolls – which were shared among Europe's leading courts to showcase the latest fashions – for Historic Environment Scotland

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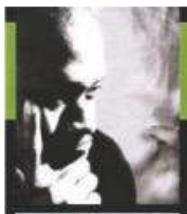

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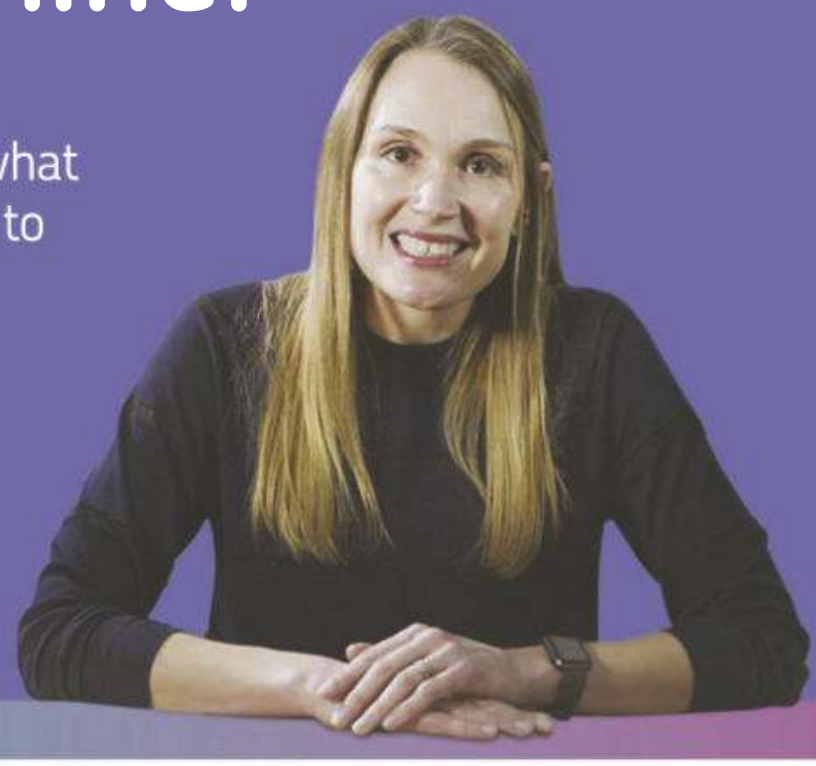

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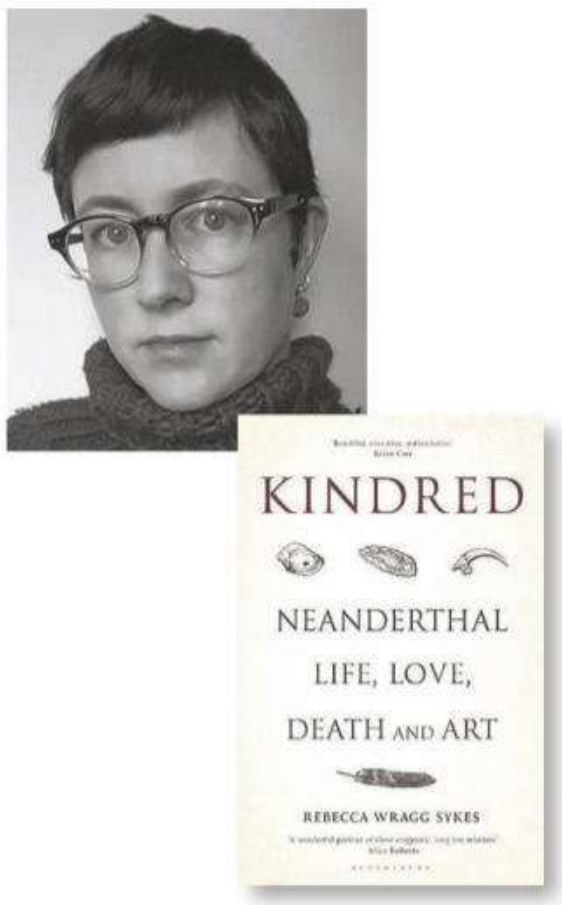
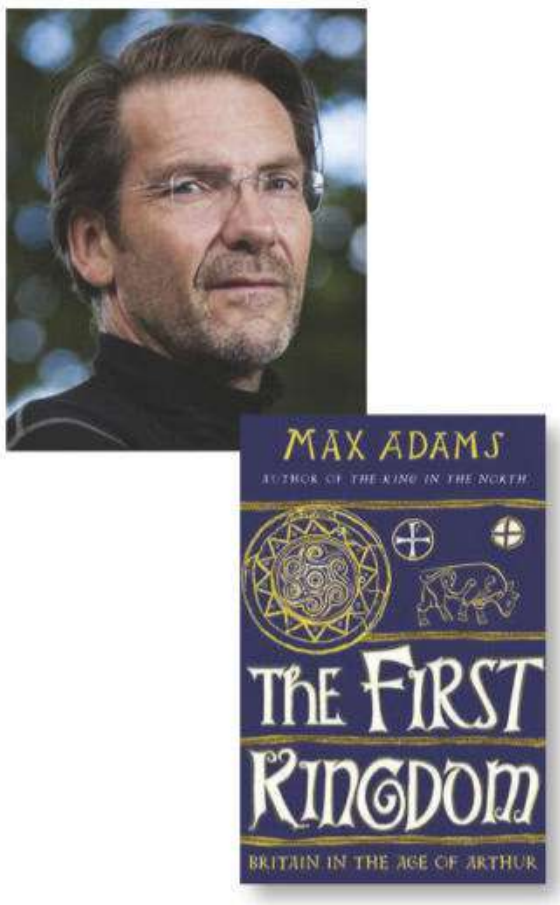


Rebecca Wragg Sykes
Kindred: Neanderthal Life, Love, Death and Art

Rebecca reveals what we know now about the enigmatic Neanderthals, explaining what they were and what they weren't, where their incredible journey starts and finishes – as well as delving into how far their story intersects with that of Homo sapiens.

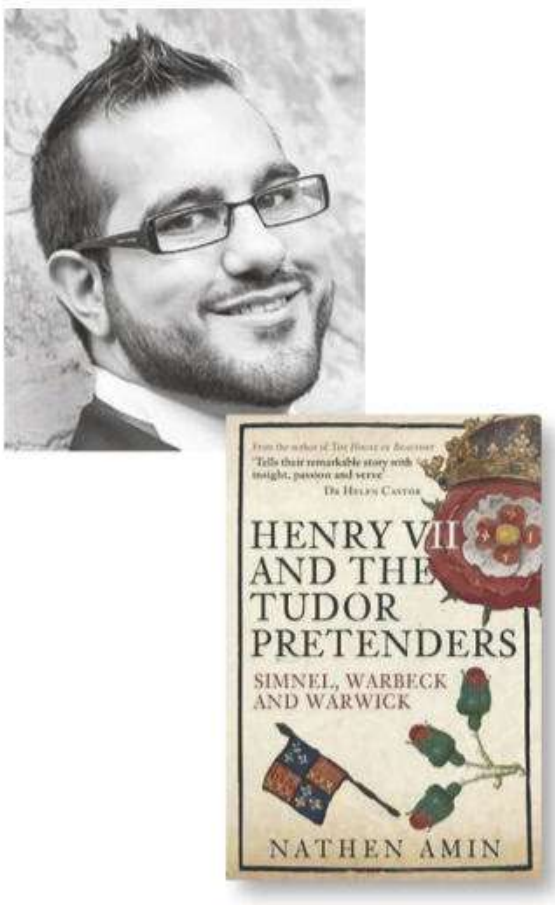
Thursday 28 January 2021, 7pm



Max Adams
The First Kingdom: Britain in the Age of Arthur

For 200 years after the fall of the Roman empire in around AD 400, Britain's history is deeply obscure – and irresistibly interesting. Max pieces together fragments of history and archaeology to paint a picture of a dynamic people living in tumultuous times of hardship and uncertainty.

Thursday 11 February 2021, 7pm



Nathen Amin
Henry VII and the Tudor Pretenders

Nathen looks at the myriad conspiracies and murky plots that were devised to depose Henry Tudor early in his reign, focusing on the three pretenders whose causes were fervently advanced by conniving Yorkist dissidents – Lambert Simnel, Perkin Warbeck and Edward, Earl of Warwick.

Thursday 25 February 2021, 7pm

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BOOKS

COLONIALISM

"Crises of conscience led to imperial rule being repeatedly justified rather than abandoned"

Priya Atwal (right) on *Time's Monster* by Priya Satia › page 86

1960s

"It was the coldest and bleakest of times. The country seemed in suspended animation"

Alwyn Turner gives his verdict on Juliet Nicolson's *Frostquake* › page 82

INTERVIEW

"You have to hold up a candle to get the merest glimpse of what's going on at this time"

Max Adams on his new book about early medieval Britain, *The First Kingdom* › page 78

POSTWAR EUROPE

"The war was the definitive proof that Europeans were no more 'civilised' than anyone else"

Keith Lowe reviews Paul Betts' *Ruin and Renewal* › page 85

FICTION

"Medieval medicine had coherent logic even when it lacked effectiveness or evidence"

Christopher Wilson on his new novel set in the Middle Ages, *Hurdy Gurdy* › page 87

NATHAN CLARKE

INTERVIEW / MAX ADAMS

"You can think of this era as a black hole into which our history tumbles"

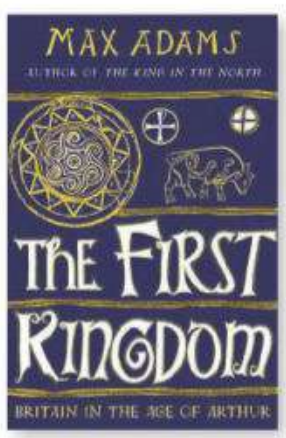
MAX ADAMS speaks to Ellie Cawthorne about his book *The First Kingdom*, which unravels the mystery of what may have happened in Britain in the centuries after the Romans left

Ellie Cawthorne: Your new book pieces together the centuries following the fall of Roman Britain in around AD 400. This was an era that fell between two major, limelight-grabbing historical epochs. So what makes it an interesting period to study?

Max Adams: Every early medieval archaeologist has to take on the 'Dark Ages' sooner or later. It's a bit like a Shakespearean actor taking on Lear. At some point, you're going to have to take a stab at it. You could think of this very obscure period as a black hole into which our history tumbles. You have to hold up a candle to get the merest glimpse of what's going on, which also makes it irresistible.

Anyone investigating the early Middle Ages starts with the great historian of western Europe in that period, the Venerable Bede. But even Bede, who is prolific in the extreme, says hardly anything about Britain at this time. He covers around 150 years in just 19 lines. There are no Roman sources, and the only narratives we have are a ranting sermon from a cleric that we can't even date, a couple of documents from St Patrick, and a few obscure references from the continent.

Traditional interpretations of this period have been completely shackled by nationalism – they are all about Britons who are slaves or Anglo-Saxon invaders, as if these rules of national ethnicity apply in this period. This is partly because the primary historian we have to rely on is Gildas, a priest who you would now think of as a sort of ranting, fulminating fundamentalist. He doesn't mince his words – Saxons are "filthy dogs" and bad Christian kings are "but the bastard children of prostitutes". But that's not very helpful for actually reconstructing history. So in *The First Kingdom*, I've tried to get away from all that.



The First Kingdom: Britain in the Age of Arthur
by Max Adams
(Head of Zeus, 480 pages, £30)

Can archaeology give us any more clues?

Archaeologists have spent the last 150 years showing how their discipline can deliver. And this is the period when we need archaeology to deliver more than ever. But unfortunately, either we've got very little to draw on, or the tools that we normally have at our disposal are missing for this period.

First of all, we rely on things we can date, like pieces of wood with tree rings in them. But for the years 400 to 600, we have very few examples of those available. Pottery, which we also use to date sites, was not being made in industrial quantities. The other get-out-of-jail-free card for archaeologists is radiocarbon dating, which can normally supply dates within around 50 years. But it just so happens that the carbon atmospheric content goes haywire for those 200 years, so even that is no help. All we can do is scrape away with our trowels and try to piece together the fragments of evidence we have.

What might this lack of evidence suggest about what happened in Britain after the fall of Rome?

That's the old question of any first term undergraduate archaeology degree: is it evidence of absence or is it absence of evidence? Are we missing something because we're not looking in the right place or is there simply nothing to find? Increasingly sensitive archaeology is showing that the stuff is there. But it's pretty hard to get at, and when we do get at it, it's quite difficult to understand what's going on. So we have to do some imaginative thinking around the archaeology to portray a much more subtle picture.

And what exactly was the "fall of Rome"? Was it a catastrophe? A revolution? Or an evolution too subtle for us to keep a close eye on? The idea that Britain was overrun by Italian sword-wielding legionaries who suddenly abandoned ship in the fourth century certainly doesn't hold up. Britain at the time is British. The languages spoken are Brittonic – a recognisable antecedent to Welsh – late colloquial vernacular Latin, Irish and some form of Germanic-Friesian dialect, which ends up as a sort of lingua franca 200 years later. We can't really be sure whether that is because of an invasion of German peoples, which is the traditional view, or if there's something more subtle going on. People today eat McDonald's and drive Japanese cars but it doesn't mean that we're subject to military conquest by those people. The artefacts that archaeologists find are not biographies of the people with whom we find them.

One thing we can be sure of is that Britain in AD 400 looks very different from Britain in AD 600. In order to guess how that might have happened, we can look at the institutions that we know were in place by the sixth century and try to trace them back to things happening before 400. In other words, we're not looking for absolute discontinuity or catastrophe, but for how what was already in existence in 400 might have morphed into something else.

How did things change between AD 400 and 600?

The most dramatic thing we still can't explain is a significant decline in population. The latest estimates of the population of Roman Britain are in the region of 3 to 3.5 million. By Bede's day, it was nowhere near that – those kind of population numbers weren't recovered until after Domesday Book in the late 11th century.

There are a few ways to explain that population decline. Gildas would have us believe that all those people were dying in the streets in some grand catastrophe. But if so, why don't we find the bodies? Nor

ALAMY

PROFILE

Max Adams is an archaeologist and author whose previous books include *The King in the North: The Life and Times of Oswald of Northumbria*; *Ælfred's Britain: War and Peace in the Viking Age*; and *Unquiet Women: From the Dusk of the Roman Empire to the Dawn of the Enlightenment* (all published by Head of Zeus)

do we find any evidence of people running away in fear for their lives – leaving behind their homes, their possessions, anything they can't carry – the kind of evidence that you find at Pompeii or Chernobyl. Likewise, I would question theories about a descent into chaos and warfare, because hardly any bodies from this time have weapon blade injuries. The actual number of skeletons from this time that show evidence of being injured in a fight is only about 2 per cent. Most people die of crippling diseases and old age.

More subtle explanations could be an increase in infant mortality, a slow decline in the birth rate, or perhaps an increase in the death rate leading to a decline in population over the course of 50 or even 100 years. This doesn't look anything like as dramatic as a catastrophic population collapse.

What we do find is space being repurposed, and that's a much subtler story. Somebody digging a hole through the mosaic floor in the dining room of a Roman villa and turning it into an iron smelting forge, for example. Why, instead of inviting elite friends round to dinner, is someone now smelting metal in the dining room? We also find a big blanket of dark earth covering Roman towns – what does it mean, where does it come from? You've got to do some pretty nimble thinking to try to understand a world that seems to be changing so rapidly.

A claw beaker from Britain, c500–600 AD. Archaeological evidence from the centuries following the end of Roman rule is thin

Were all the advancements of the Roman era lost?

If we're talking about an elite mosaiced Roman villa, for example – is that advancement? Or is it a pretty grotesque form of conspicuous consumption that people eventually get sick of? Think of the great country houses of Jane Austen's England. A lot of them are still around, but they aren't private homes anymore. They are hotels, or wedding venues, repurposed because their palatial ostentation looks pretty grotesque in the 21st century. Most Roman villas were not owned by people who were living in them. There were lots of absentee landlords.

And by the end of the fourth century, Roman villas didn't suit the needs of society. By then, a system of overlordship seems to have been emerging, in which local authorities were raising renders of food and services which they drew to themselves. We're talking cartloads of timber, honey or ale and horses, sheep, wool and craft products. One of the key purposes of this system was that you had to hold feasts and redistribute the goods. But the Roman villa was totally inappropriate for such activities because it was designed as a private dining space. It wouldn't work for assembly or the processing of goods.

What you begin to see instead is assembly sites built slightly away from the villas. People recreate the social dynamics of the Iron Age in a Roman granary that is transformed into a mead hall. The mead hall of Beowulf is essentially a barn conversion. Now should we see that as revolution, or adaptation to a different world?

What more can you tell us about that emerging system of overlordship?

A law of the kings of Kent states that if you're wandering through Kent in 600 and do not blow your horn to announce your presence, you can be arrested. Why is that? Because people moving through that landscape must belong to somebody. The first thing you're going to ask somebody if you meet them is: "Who is your lord?"

Instead of a Roman emperor, much more local lords emerge. These may be the former commander of the Roman fort, or the former steward of a villa whose boss is never coming back and who takes over and reorganises it as a local centre of redistributive communal dependency. The closest comparison to the way overlordship worked would be a naval frigate of the age of Nelson, where the loyalty between a captain and his dependants worked both ways – he was theirs as much as they were his.

One of the most beautiful things to emerge from Bede comes from a tiny throwaway line about the Northumbrian king Edwin spending 36 days at his palace at Yeavering. A colleague of mine, Colin O'Brien, asked: why would a great lord stay in one place for 36 days specifically? Well, 36 days is a tenth of a year. The implications of that are really profound for understanding this period. Think of all the goods and services of a territory being brought to a lord for him to use and consume. Eventually he might become lord over more than one of these territories, and if the goods are still going to one central place in that territory, how are you going to consume them? The answer is: you have to visit each territory in turn to consume its render, and you go for 36 days because you're consuming a 10 per cent tax on that land. It's a brilliant insight into how the whole system works.

One of the things about lordship is that they descend like locusts and consume a huge amount of calories. If you want to imagine a place like Yeavering, you've got to think of a Bruegel painting, or a cross between the Yorkshire County Show, Glastonbury festival, and a London inner-city riot, full of bingeing and no doubt fighting while all the food and drink was consumed in one place.

What you also see emerging are networks of patronage and dependence, in which linked families, clans and kin alliances all help to foster social cohesion when there is no state. The household was the principal social unit, a hierarchy that consisted of male and female heads of the household at the top, with all sorts of collateral relations and various levels of free and unfree dependants underneath.

"Were mosaiced Roman villas seen as an advancement? Or were they a pretty grotesque form of conspicuous consumption that people eventually grew sick of?"

Do we have any idea of how people at this time perceived of their own identity?

What's so exciting is that there seems to have been a very broad, eclectic mosaic of identities. Some people identify with land and with their households. Some communities are named after an ancestral founder, and others identify with a much broader group by the ways in which they approach life and death.

Alongside those strong senses of attachment to house, family, local place or local spirits were regional identities. If you piece together the names of all the places and peoples that we can gather, I think you can

ALAMY

Mosaic flooring at Littlecote Roman villa in Berkshire. "By the end of the fourth century, Roman villas didn't suit the needs of society," says Max Adams

create a map of sixth-century Britain which has 200–300 small regional identities, from the kingdoms of Mercia, Northumbria and Kent, right down to tiny communities often focussed on small rivers. These appear in a brilliant document called the Tribal Hidage, which records this hierarchy of peoples who owe tribute to a great overlord. What it reveals is a small scale geography of the early medieval kingdoms of Britain that were emerging after Roman rule collapsed.

This dynamic patchwork of different local identities was shaped by geography. People in the fens of East Anglia, for example, would have a very different sense of identity from people living in the Highlands or on the coast, because their environment was so completely different. Names like the "people of the muddy marsh" or "people of the spring" tell us quite a lot about what people thought about themselves. The north-south divide is always jokingly said to begin at the Watford Gap, and what's interesting is that Watling Street is a geographical dividing line between all the rivers that flow north and east and all the rivers that flow south and west. It's a real frontier in the landscape. It just shows how people are sensitive to small geographical niceties.

How did religious affiliations change – and what impact did that have on the development of society?

We tend to think of Anglo-Saxon England before Christianity as "pagan". But paganism is an unhelpful term, as all it really means is "not Christian". In this period, I suspect there was a coagulation of re-emerging Iron Age deities, highly localised sets of beliefs and belief systems like animism (where the springs, hills or trees are seen to have spirits in them). People were interested in all the things they always have been – trying to nudge the odds in your favour in matters of fate, poverty, fertility, death, illness, marriage or crop failure.

In the east of England there seems to have been a comprehensive rejection of everything Roman, including Christianity. Meanwhile, in the far west, which was highly resistant to Rome, people became ultra-Romans and embraced Christianity. An ultraconservative form of Christianity arose among peoples of the British-speaking west, which ended up exploding in their faces when St Augustine arrived in 597 and found that the bishops there were 200 years out of date.

Eventually, an intellectual literate priesthood emerged that offered kings not just success in life and on the battlefield but, to use Bede's famous metaphor, somewhere to go after they flew out of the mead hall of life into everlasting darkness. They were offered a place at God's side in perpetuity in return for giving the church freehold land. That's the deal that took us out of the Dark Ages – from that point on, medieval Europe took off in spectacular fashion.

One figure that is always mentioned when we talk about this period is King Arthur. Why are people so obsessed with him, and can we track him down in any kind of historical record?

Let me cheat that question by asking another one: why are archaeologists *not* interested in Arthur? Talk to almost any archaeologist and they'll say Arthur is uninteresting and irrelevant. It's not that we think Arthur didn't exist. If Arthur didn't exist, there were certainly *Arthurs*. And I think if you were to put him anywhere, you have to put him in the early fifth century. If he's anything, he's Roman. But he was not a king. By the time that Arthur is put into a series of annals with dates next to his name, there aren't any kings, there are only petty lords. If he's anything, he's a military commander.

The real problem with Arthur is not that he might not have existed, but that he doesn't tell us anything useful. What can he tell us about the system of lordship emerging in this period? Where are his territories? Who are his people? What's his genealogy? He gives us nothing. He's not a territorial lord and therefore he doesn't help us explain anything about the political development of a new geography of people and lordship.

In order to understand why people are obsessed with Arthur, you really need to look to the ninth century, when the legends surrounding him crop up. It's a period of huge uncertainty and everyone's looking for a saint. The church is collapsing, and Scandinavians are attacking. As the powerful dynasties of competing Anglo-Saxon and Welsh states are beginning to consolidate their power, they want heroic forebears to look back on and say: "Not only were we great once, we can be great again." Those myths need a convenient, heroic person to coalesce around – someone like Arthur. H

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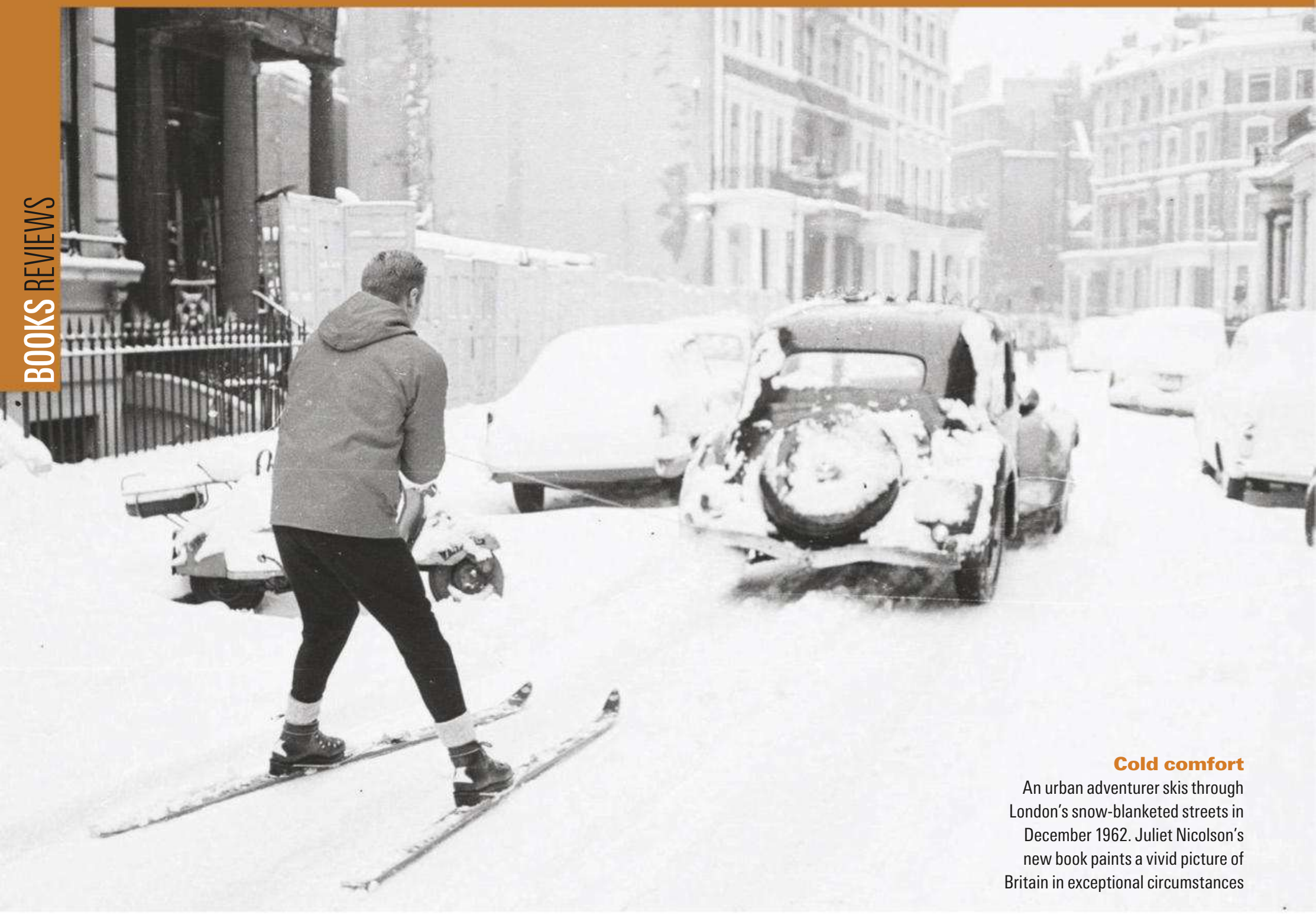
Listen to an extended version of this interview with Max Adams on our podcast soon at **historyextra.com/podcast**

ALAMY

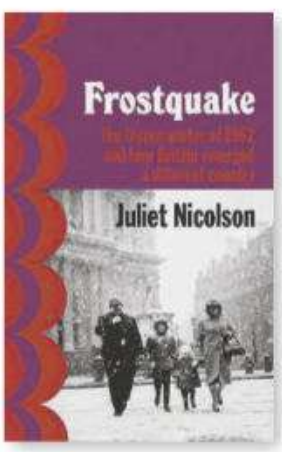


Cold comfort
An urban adventurer skis through London's snow-blanketed streets in December 1962. Juliet Nicolson's new book paints a vivid picture of Britain in exceptional circumstances

MODERN BRITAIN

A winter's tale

ALWYN TURNER considers an original take on the cultural and political impact of 1962's "Great Freeze" – the extraordinary winter that held Britain in its icy grip for 10 long weeks



Frostquake: The Frozen Winter of 1962 and How Britain Emerged a Different Country
by Juliet Nicolson
Chatto & Windus, 368 pages, £18.99

There hasn't been anything since to match the 10-week freeze that hit Britain in the winter of 1962–63. It was the coldest and bleakest of times. The Solent froze, icebergs in the Irish Sea posed a danger to shipping, and it seemed as though the country was in suspended animation, with transport grinding to a halt and unemployment soaring.

Water pipes froze, so people queued to use standpipes in the streets. To compound the misery, power workers took the opportunity to pursue a pay claim; their work to rule action led to power cuts. Even after the dispute was settled, the unprecedented demands on the national grid meant that the electricity supply could not be guaranteed.

There were unexpected consequences for consumers and retailers, too. Sales of tights, hitherto worn only by schoolgirls and dancers, experienced a boost because they offered greater protection from the plunging temperatures than stockings. And mothers of newborn babies were advised to use disposable nappies, recently introduced to the market, because the icy conditions made it impossible to dry the old flannelette ones.

Animals fared worse than humans. Starving foxes attacked sheep; kestrels were driven to the indignity of dining at domestic bird tables; and the songbird population was

GETTY IMAGES

decimated, with many dropping frozen from the skies. At Drusillas Park in Sussex, Big Joey the kangaroo was brought indoors to ensure he was comfortable enough, and the elephants at Paignton Zoo were given a tot of rum with their breakfast to warm them up. In London Zoo, though, Reuben the mountain gorilla contracted pneumonia and died in December. The penguins at Whipsnade, of course, were in their element.

Juliet Nicolson's new book is a treasure trove of such details, which won't surprise anyone who read *The Great Silence*, her splendid account of the aftermath of the First World War. Her depiction of Britain during this coldest of winters is equally panoramic, and it's not all about the weather. There are shivering schoolgirls huddled under frosted eiderdowns, but there's also Cecil Beaton cowering in fear that Rudolf Nureyev, newly defected from the Soviet Union, might smash up his furniture, so primeval does the young dancer from Siberia appear. There are milkmen unable to complete their rounds, forced to leave deliveries at village pubs for collection, and then there are the final tragic days of Sylvia Plath. There's even an unknown Bob Dylan stalking the folk clubs of London; he was slated to star in a BBC play – until it was discovered that he couldn't act.

The big picture is one of a national rebirth. The "Great Freeze", as Plath noted, saw Britain caught "in a limbo between the old world and the very uncertain and rather grim new". The Conservative government, in power for 12 years, was exhausted, directionless and all out of ideas. In January 1963, President de Gaulle unilaterally turned down Britain's request to join the European Community, leaving Harold Macmillan to fret about his country's declining status; he worried, as the governing class has done ever since, that "we could not hope to go on exerting the same political influence".

Yet this was also the winter that saw the dawn of the "Swinging Sixties". The Black and White Minstrels might have topped the albums charts, and the most popular television programme might have been *Coronation Street*, but an alternative was bursting through: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, *That Was the Week That Was*. Youth was breaking out all over, with the likes of Mary Quant, Jean Shrimpton and David Bailey setting the pace.

Even politics was forced to adjust to the new reality. The death that January of Hugh Gaitskell, the first major party leader to have been born in the 20th century, paved the way for the election of the even younger Harold Wilson as Labour leader. And it was not de Gaulle but the showgirls Christine Keeler and Mandy Rice-Davies who ultimately discredited Macmillan's faltering premiership, as the Profumo Scandal erupted onto the front pages.

It's a familiar story, of course, but one that bears retelling, especially when it's this beautifully written. Nicolson uses the imagery of freeze and thaw as a metaphor for the new Britain that was being born, a conceit as elegant in its execution as in its conception.

It falters somewhat when it loses that focus, venturing across the Atlantic for the founding of the environmental movement and the second wave of American feminism. Gloria Steinem's report of her time as an undercover Bunny Girl at the newly opened Playboy Club in Manhattan was undoubtedly significant, but it sits awkwardly in a book about frozen Britain, where there was no such institution. We also visit New York in the company of the author's grandfather, Harold Nicolson, mourning the death of his wife, Vita Sackville-West. Again, the detours into family history feel out of place.

"It was the coldest and bleakest of times: the Solent froze, icebergs posed a danger to shipping, and the country seemed to be in suspended animation"

Most unnecessary is the extensive back story provided for the Beatles, from the death of Paul McCartney's mother in 1956 to Nicolson's own present-day impressions of McCartney's childhood home, as recreated by the National Trust. This adds nothing to her vivid depiction of the band that winter, trudging around Britain on a tour headlined by Helen Shapiro shortly before "Please Please Me" rises to the top of the *NME* charts. The first screams of Beatlemania are being heard, and at Chatsworth House, both the Duchess of Devonshire and her butler tap their toes to the group's first appearance on *Thank Your Lucky Stars*. When we depart from that immediacy, the narrative suffers.

Nicolson writes of how Harold Evans, then editing the *Northern Echo* in Durham, found "the tedium of covering the relentless bad weather a challenge". In marked contrast, she has largely risen to that challenge to blaze a fresh path through well-trodden territory. H

Alwyn Turner is senior lecturer in history at the University of Chichester

AUTHORS ON THE PODCAST

Susan Cohen on the early years of the NHS

"The whole notion of this medical care being free was astonishing, but it had very different effects on different people. There were some who were actually embarrassed about going to the doctor and having free medical care or a free prescription. One student of radiology said she couldn't believe that whatever it was she needed was going to be given free of charge. Some people were worried about what their neighbours would think if they went to the doctor and got something for free."

Rosie Whitehouse on Holocaust survivors who sailed to Palestine

"In popular culture, I think we have a view of Holocaust survivors as people who were victims, people who were weak and unable to help themselves. As my book shows, these were actually people of tremendous agency. For example, the people who sailed on the *Josiah Wedgwood* to begin new lives in Palestine were very far from weak victims, unable to look after themselves."

Mark Glancy on how Cary Grant became a Hollywood icon

"My interest was fired by the question of how he got to be Cary Grant; of how a relatively uneducated, working-class boy born in Bristol in 1904 became the most sophisticated, glamorous, debonair man in the universe just two decades later. That was a major factor in my decision to write a book about him."

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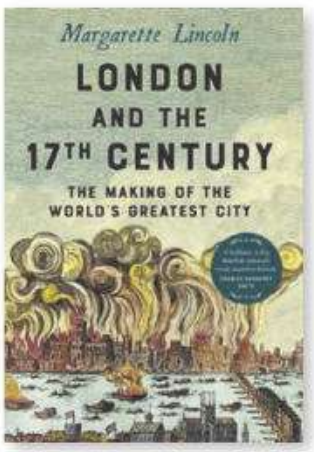
STUART

City living

JONATHAN HEALEY enjoys an evocative portrait of England's capital during a formative century, covering everything from plague and fire to street life and coffeehouse culture



London and the 17th Century: The Making of the World's Greatest City
by Margarette Lincoln
Yale, 384 pages, £25

Capital punishment King Charles I's execution at Whitehall in 1649 – just one of the momentous events to occur in England's capital during the 17th century, as a new book by Margarette Lincoln explores

In the 17th century, London was a jumbling, juggling city of work, play, debate and discord. It was the beating heart of England's economy: a multicultural metropolis at the centre of a growing empire. And, with its sister city of Westminster, it was the apex of English politics and law. Famously, it groaned under plague in 1665, then burnt to cinders in 1666. But, as Margarette Lincoln's new book shows, there is so much more to London's 17th-century story than plague and fire.

There is plenty to relish about this book. It shows a growing city, grappling with a turbulent century of history. It shows how much of the modern landscape, despite the great fire and the Blitz, still owes itself to the Stuart century. And it shows a city built by the ordinary lives of women, men, children workers, aldermen, thinkers, aristocrats and royals.

Readers will enjoy having their preconceived ideas about Cromwell's Republic challenged, and will be fascinated by the origins of coffeehouse culture. The book is particularly good on London's emerging built landscape, and on the social and economic life of the city. Lincoln's style is easy and flowing: her prose full of the sights and sounds. We hear the rumble of cart wheels and the songs of the traders. We hear snippets of conversations, arguments and ill-advised words of political anger, like those of Joan Sherrard, who called King Charles I a "stuttering foole" in 1644, way before it was sensible to do so. Indeed, this is a real strength of the book: Lincoln writes with real sympathy to the lives of all Londoners – not just the Pepyses and the Evelyns.

I had two minor grumbles. The first was religion: there isn't enough of it. To really get London, we need to remember that even in Shakespeare's day it was much easier to hear a sermon than a play. London was a discontented Babel of controversial viewpoints, where theological debate took place over pots of ale and where radical political groups like the Levellers evolved out of "Independent" congregations. The book, which simplifies early Stuart religion to a controversy between "Anglicans", "Catholics" and "Puritans", doesn't quite capture this. Secondly, while the political context is there in the book, it doesn't – for me – quite manage to convey the way in which London was itself driving political events. The crowd was a crucial force in English politics, particularly in the great crisis moments like 1640–42 and 1678–82. This could have bolstered Lincoln's central point: that London was a crucible of 17th-century English history. Perhaps, as with so many popular histories, there is just a little bit too much time spent on processions and pageants and not enough on petitions and protests.

> **"Seventeenth-century London was a discontented Babel of controversial viewpoints, where theological debate took place over pots of ale"**

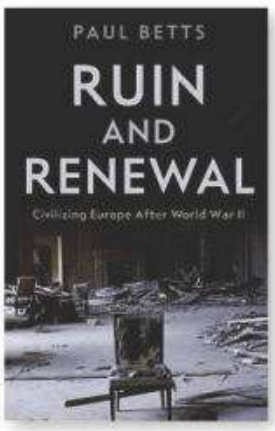
Still, this is a satisfying, lively book, befitting a fascinating subject. For anyone wishing to understand London in this vital, formative period of its history – or even just wishing to see how a growing early modern city ticked – this is a great place to start. A vivid portrayal of a vibrant city. H

Jonathan Healey is associate professor in social history at Kellogg College, University of Oxford

BRIDGEMAN

Building back better

KEITH LOWE recommends a fascinating exploration of how concepts of "civilisation" were expressed in postwar Europe



Ruin and Renewal: Civilising Europe After World War II
by Paul Betts
Profile, 544 pages, £25

What is civilisation? Is it the glorious summit of our climb out of the primeval swamp? Is it the triumph of culture and manners over the forces of barbarism? Or is it simply an excuse to proclaim ourselves better than our neighbours, and justify our attempts to dominate them?

For those who were tasked with rebuilding Europe after the Second World War, these were not just theoretical questions. They cut right to the heart of who Europeans thought they were, at a time when they were trying to create a new world out of the ashes of the old.

The war had inspired hope and despair in equal measure. On the one hand, it seemed to have proven beyond doubt that man was at heart nothing but a savage beast. German philosopher Theodor Adorno's famous observation in 1949 that there could be no poetry after Auschwitz was an expression of the disillusionment that many intellectuals felt over the failure of "civilisation". Germany, the nation that had produced Beethoven and Goethe, was now also the nation that had brought about the Holocaust.

On the other hand, there was also a vast outpouring of hope in 1945. Had not the forces of darkness been defeated? The frenzy of rebuilding that took place in the aftermath of the war was an expression of a determination to reject the violence that had gone before, to rebuild "civilisation" and perhaps even create a better society than the one that had just been destroyed. This was the era in which Europe's welfare states were set up, its housing stock renewed, a new consumer culture established – and all of it regulated by new institutions such as the IMF, the UN and the forerunners of the European Union.

> **"The frenzy of rebuilding in the aftermath of the war was an expression of a determination to reject the violence that had gone before, to rebuild 'civilisation'"**

In his fascinating and complex new study of postwar Europe, Paul Betts explores the idea of "civilisation", and all the nuances hidden inside this deceptive word. Communists, for example, tried to sell their ideology as a way to create a fairer, more "civilised" society, but in the west, communism was usually regarded as – in the words of Pope Pius XII – a "mortal threat from the east" sent to destroy "Christian civilisation". Likewise, western consumer culture was hailed by some as the blessing that would lift millions out of poverty, but by others as the curse that would reduce us all to what the German-American philosopher Herbert Marcuse called "One-Dimensional Man".

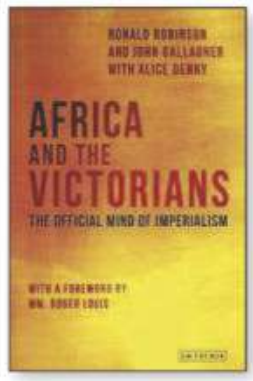
The most controversial parts of Betts' book relate to the global aspirations of the European powers. For 200 years, Europeans had justified their colonial expansion through Asia and Africa with claims to be spreading "civilisation", and in the aftermath of the war, they fought to re-establish their rule over far-flung lands. For the peoples of Africa and Asia, however, the Second World War was the final, definitive proof that Europeans were no more "civilised" than anyone else, and that it was now time for them to pursue their own ideas of civilisation and progress.

Today, as western influence begins to wane, perhaps these are lessons we should also take to heart. It is all very well to proclaim ourselves "civilised" – but the proof is in how we act towards our friends and enemies alike. H

Keith Lowe is the author of *The Fear and the Freedom: How the Second World War Changed Us* (Viking, 2017)

THE CLASSIC BOOK

Ashley Jackson on a groundbreaking look at governmental views of colonisation



Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism
by Ronald Robinson and John Gallagher
(First published in 1961)

This classic text has been a fixture of university reading lists for six decades. It's a masterful exposition of how events on the ground in Africa were viewed from Whitehall by those responsible for formulating imperial policy, sanctioning annexations or military expeditions, and engaging in the politics of "the Scramble" alongside governments across Europe.

The authors brilliantly dissect the "push" and "pull" factors leading to the continent's rapid late 19th-century colonisation. "Push" factors propelling the British forward included the chartered companies and missionary societies, and the government's own interests in Africa, born especially of strategic imperatives such as the need to maintain the "watch on the Nile" and the Suez Canal, as well as the Cape sea route. "Pull" factors sucking agents of British expansion ever further into the African interior included wars in Zululand and the Sudan, the depredations of settlers and traders, the wiles of African kings, and the actions of over-zealous "men on the spot", keen to inch the Union Flag closer to Cairo and leaving London to pick up the pieces.

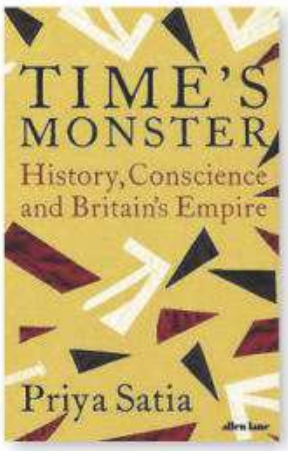
This transformatively eye-opening book has been vigorously debated ever since. A notable advertisement for academic collaboration – involving the organisational assistance of Robinson's wife, Alice Denny – it's the type of work to which all historians aspire, but few attain. H

Ashley Jackson is professor of imperial and military history at King's College London. His latest book is *Persian Gulf Command* (Yale, 2018)

BRITISH EMPIRE

Past imperfect

PRIYA ATWAL praises a powerful examination of the role that the discipline of history itself played in justifying British colonisation and oppression across the globe



Time's Monster: History, Conscience and Britain's Empire
by Priya Satia
Allen Lane, 384 pages, £25

The absorbing depth with which Priya Satia addresses an ambitious range of modern society's most profound problems and questions in this book is phenomenal. In asking how British men felt able to justify running an empire rooted in violence and systemic inequality, her discussion of this ethical conundrum runs into wonderfully imaginative, even astronomical and spiritual spaces. She is really concerned with the making of history as a modern discipline over the centuries since the Enlightenment, and the powerful impact of this on humanity's relationships with power, nature and time itself.

During the Enlightenment, she suggests, history emerged as an ethical idiom for the modern period. She contends that "The narrative of the British empire is, thus, also a narrative of the rise and fall of a particular historical sensibility." *Time's Monster* explores how notions of progress, combined with the development of a linear understanding of time, came to dominate western liberal thought on politics and history. The author links these ideas with a richly detailed analysis of how the tools and ideas of the emerging historical discipline became bound up with the very expansion of empire. She shows how crises of conscience led to imperial rule being repeatedly justified rather than abandoned, beginning with the aftermath of American independence and continuing through a series of colonial wars and suppressed rebellions in Jamaica, India, Afghanistan, Ireland and Iraq, to name just a few of her wide-ranging examples.

Tracing the thread that connects Mill, Macaulay and Churchill with the current British prime minister, Satia shows how history writing has, more often than not, been supportive of empire, war and domination by so-called "great men". At first, champions of liberal imperialism chose to leave judgment of the morality of their actions to future historians. Collective consciences were then assuaged by a growing body of orientalist and colonial scholarship that deemed the west's "modern civilisation" to be the surest endpoint of historical development, allowing Britain to unselfconsciously pose as the rightful, preordained tutor of millions of colonised people.

Company lines Sikh soldiers stand to attention, c1880. The work of orientalists and colonial scholars allowed Britain to paint itself as a "civilising" force across its empire, notably in India

Satia builds on the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty to show how this domineering teleology was ruptured by the urgency of global anti-imperialist movements, with colonial subjects resurrecting lost cultural understandings of time and imagining their own historical frameworks to empower their escape from the "waiting room of history".

> **"Satia shows how history writing has, more often than not, been supportive of empire, war and domination by so-called 'great men'"**

Though she takes the discipline to pieces, Satia doesn't advocate ditching history altogether. She concurs that making today's scholarship more socially inclusive and publicly engaged can help undo the structural inequalities in which past historians are implicated. Most powerfully, however, Satia urges us to keep the climate crisis in mind when thinking about human history. She encourages historians to step outside the bounds of Enlightenment notions of self-driven agency and linear progression to consider the "fullness of time" in a cosmic and planetary scale, as well as paying greater heed to the impact of forces beyond human control – nature, stars, the gods – that modern society all too often disregards.

In short, this is a history of empire driven by a humble, rather than hubristic, sense of human agency. H

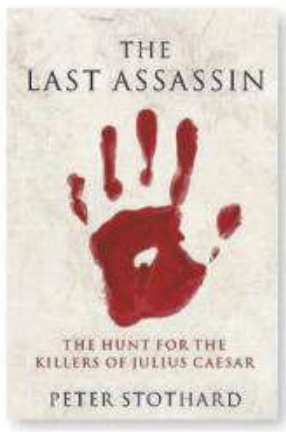
Priya Atwal is the author of *Royals and Rebels: The Rise and Fall of the Sikh Empire* (Hurst, 2020)

GETTY IMAGES

ANCIENT ROME

A chronicle of killers

EDWIN SHAW enjoys a book that shines a spotlight on the lesser-known players in the dramatic death of Julius Caesar



The Last Assassin
by Peter Stothard
Weidenfeld & Nicolson,
288 pages, £20

"When beggars die, there are no comets seen; the heavens themselves blaze forth the death of princes." So wrote Shakespeare of the "Julian star" that marked Caesar's death and – at least, according to his adopted heir, Octavian – his ascent into the heavens. In this stimulating book, Peter Stothard focuses on the less-heralded players in the aftermath of Caesar's murder, tracing the period through the varied ends of his killers – in battle, by suicide or at the executioner's hand.

From the plotters' first moves to the bloody consequences of their actions on the battlefields of the 40s and 30s BC and the quiet elimination of the last survivors, Stothard frames the narrative as one of violent revenge. Counting off the conspirators' deaths, he focuses in particular on Cassius Parmensis – a relatively minor figure but one present at many of the critical events of the era until he ran out of hiding places. He was the last of the tyrannicides to die.

The period has been studied many times before, but Stothard's compelling book gives shape to the political infighting, combining vivid personal detail – such as the grim apparition that dogged Cassius in his final days, portending his death – with a clear account of the shifting alliances of these years.

Stothard writes with a poet's eye for atmosphere and a novelist's imagination in reconstructing events – necessary qualities, given the limitations and Augustan spin of his source material. He does, though, make excellent use of such material as we have, including lead sling-bullets from Perusia, daubed with crude sexual threats. Fortunately, he also draws on a deep knowledge of the Roman context, and a sensitivity to the human complexity of events; his account stresses above all the plotters' uncertainty, fear and misery. All in all, this is a striking and evocative treatment of this transformative period. H

"Cassius Parmensis, the last of the tyrannicides to die, was present at many of the critical events of the era"

Edwin Shaw is lecturer in ancient history at the University of Bristol

GETTY IMAGES

A tyrant toppled The assassination of Julius Caesar, depicted in an early 19th-century Italian painting. Peter Stothard follows the fortunes of the dictator's killers to explore a pivotal period in Roman history

FROM FACT TO FICTION

Dead wrong

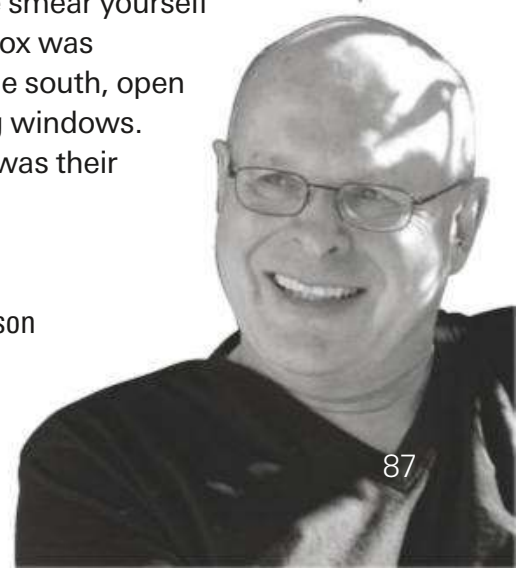
Christopher Wilson on *Hurdy Gurdy,* his fictional take on the world of medieval medicine

Why did the Black Death intrigue you as the backdrop for a story?
I wrote the novel pre-Covid but, sensing a dismal turn in world events, the Black Death seemed to resonate with that gloom. Here was a tragedy of human suffering, and a comedy of human ignorance. Medieval culture was clever, curious and analytic but it lacked the intellectual tools to see, understand or combat the natural force – the tiny bug – that was destroying it. The plague was seen as a miasma of foul airs, probably God's punishment on a wicked world. Medicine didn't help. The church couldn't intercede. Power proved impotent. It was a perfect catastrophe.

Tell us about your young protagonist.
Diggory is a teenage novice monk. The brothers treat the sick, so he's thrown into contact with the plague. He mirrors his society. He's educated and ignorant, open-minded and dogmatic, pious and sensual. He's a God-fearing chancer. He sets out, as a plague doctor, to cure the sick. Instead he unwittingly carries the Black Death with him, infecting those he meets, killing off those he loves. This is his journey of discovery, exploring science, sex, sin and virtue en route. He emerges wiser but without realising exactly what's gone on.

What did you learn about medieval medicine in your research?
Medicine in the Middle Ages was misinformed about basics such as female anatomy, but it had coherent logic even when it lacked effectiveness or evidence. If illness was an imbalance of the "four humours", it made sense to taste a patient's urine for taints. If the plague was caused by foul air, you could counter it with stronger smells – perfumes and stenches, maybe smear yourself with poo. If the pox was travelling from the south, open only north-facing windows. Common sense was their best defence.

Hurdy Gurdy
by Christopher Wilson
(Faber & Faber,
256 pages, £14.99)



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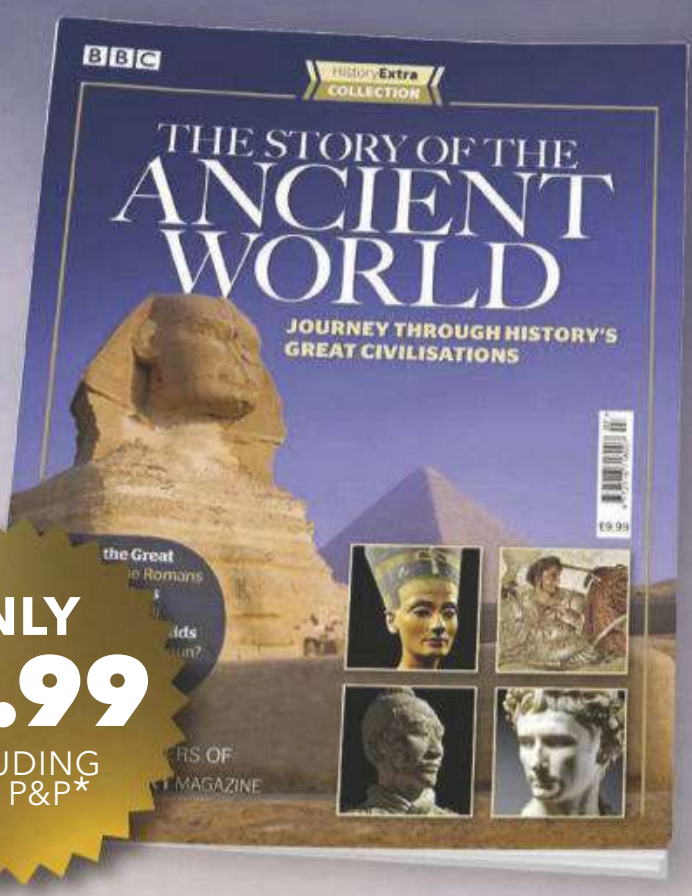

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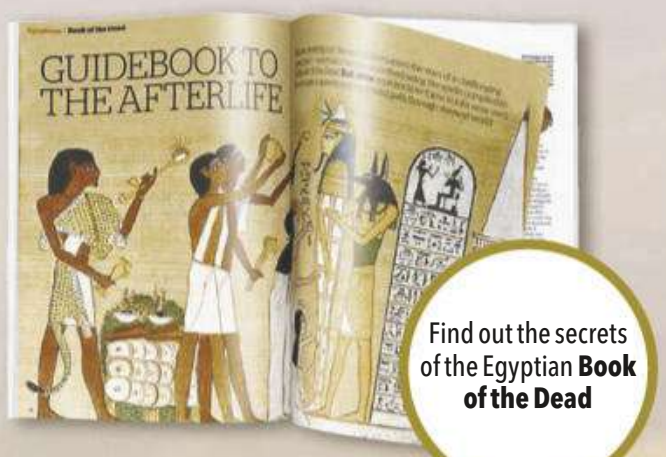

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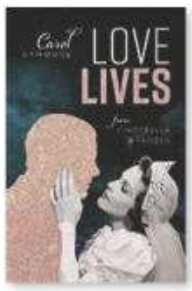
WORDS BY **ELLIE CAWTHORNE** AND **MATT ELTON**

ELF

ALSO ON THE BOOKSHELF

SOCIAL

Love Lives: From Cinderella to Frozen
by Carol Dyhouse
(OUP, 288 pages, £20)

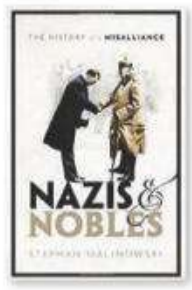


Happily ever after?

In the 1950s, the western world fell in love with Cinderella, cheering her on in the hunt for Prince Charming. Fast forward four decades, and a very different fairytale was being proffered to women, in the freedom and flings of *Sex and the City*. In her new book, historian Carol Dyhouse explores how films and pop culture have reflected women's evolving expectations of love, sex and marriage since 1950.

GERMANY

Nazis and Nobles: The History of a Misalliance
by Stephan Malinowski
(translated by Jonathan Andrews)
(OUP, 469 pages, £30)

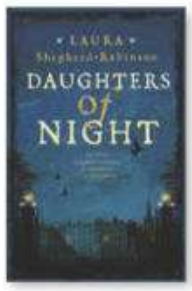


Deal with the devil

When it comes to the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, there's far more to the story than a few brownshirted thugs muscling their way into office. As Stephan Malinowski shows in his award-winning German-language title (now translated into English), the success of Hitler's power grab was also highly reliant on the actions (and often inaction) of influential members of Germany's aristocracy.

FICTION

Daughters of Night
by Laura Shepherd-Robinson
(Mantle, 592 pages, £14.99)



Brothels and backstreets

It's 1782, and a young woman lies dead in Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. When the Bow Street constables drop their investigation after discovering the murdered woman was a notable courtesan, Caro Corsham takes the case into her own hands. From the author of 2019's *Blood & Sugar*, this journey into Georgian London's seedy underbelly is one for fans of *Harlots* or *Ripper Street*.

CHINA

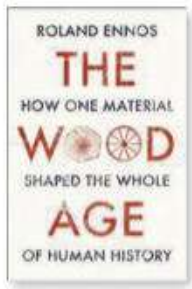
The Emperor's Feast: A History of China in Twelve Meals
by Jonathan Clements
(Hodder & Stoughton, 320 pages, £25)

Dining down the ages

Whether seared, stewed or sizzling, China has served up its fair share of edible marvels over the past 5,000 years. Here, Jonathan Clements uses an array of culinary tales to explore what foodstuffs can tell us about the civilisation's changing culture, touching on ancient medicinal tea, Han dynasty "Barbarian Cakes", Mongolian barbecues and how Mao used sweet potatoes as a propaganda weapon.

SOCIAL

The Wood Age: How One Material Shaped the Whole of Human History
by Roland Ennos
(William Collins, 336 pages, £20)

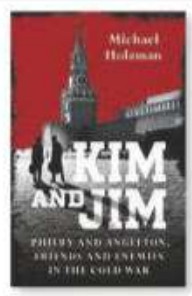


A poplar history

From the leafy habitats of our primate cousins to vanished urban jungles of oak and cedar, we have long looked to trees for the materials to reshape our world. Buildings, tools, instruments both practical and musical, weapons of war: all are explored in this lively account, which takes some satisfying detours off the beaten track. The Pine Tree Riot of 1772, for instance, deserves to be better known.

POLITICAL

Kim and Jim
by Michael Holzman
(Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 352 pages, £20)



Spy v spy

Filtering 20th-century geopolitical tensions through the story of the titular duo, Kim Philby and James Jesus Angleton, this account hinges on the 1963 revelation that Philby was part of the Cambridge Five, which had been providing the Soviet Union with intel since the Second World War. It was to forever change Angleton's relationship with his former mentor – not to mention the course of the Cold War.

FICTION

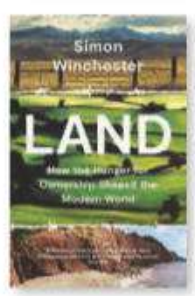
The Paris Library
by Janet Skeslien Charles
(Two Roads, 432 pages, £14.99)

Books and barbarism

This ode to the power of the written word celebrates the bravery of workers at Paris's American Library as Nazi forces invaded. Flitting backwards and forwards in time between the Second World War and the 1980s, it intertwines the stories of Odile – who starts a new job at the library – and Lily, a girl who strikes up a friendship with her mysterious next-door neighbour in a small Montana town.

GLOBAL

Land: How the Hunger for Ownership Shaped the World
by Simon Winchester
(William Collins, 464 pages, £25)



Surface tension

How have people fought and negotiated, traded and exploited, to secure their place in the physical landscape? That's the question at the heart of this wide-ranging, stylish account, which takes in Bronze Age farming, the expulsion of Native Americans and the 19th-century "scramble for Africa" along the way. As Earth's human population skyrockets, this is a subject that's only set to become more topical.

ENCOUNTERS

DIARY: LISTEN / WATCH / TASTE
By **Jonathan Wright**, **Samantha Nott** and **Matt Elton**

GETTY IMAGES

LISTEN

Pope and president

Four decades ago, within little more than six weeks of each other, two of the most important leaders of the late 20th century, US president Ronald Reagan and Pope John Paul II, were shot in assassination attempts. As the men recuperated, they exchanged letters, a prelude to their first meeting, which took place at the Vatican in June 1982 and where the two men talked for almost an hour.

No official record of their conversation has ever been released, but one idea is that the duo began a secret collaborative effort to bring down the Soviet Union – a holy alliance, as it was dubbed by *Time* magazine. This measured documentary, presented by broadcaster and journalist Jane Little, certainly doesn't indulge the more fanciful interpretations of what happened. But it does trace the story of a relationship that was without doubt hugely important – to each of the men and to wider history.

Both actively opposed communism, while Reagan foresaw "the march of freedom and democracy" leaving "Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history", as he set out in a speech to the British parliament in 1982.

In the late 1980s, this shared perspective collided with *perestroika* (a restructuring programme in the Soviet Union), the rise of the independent trade union Solidarity in Poland and the fall of the Berlin Wall. An atmospheric documentary that looks at familiar history through an unfamiliar lens.

Archive On Four: The Alliance
BBC Radio 4 / Saturday 23 January

Shared purpose
Pope John Paul II and US president Ronald Reagan meet in Alaska, May 1984. A new documentary explores how twin assassination attempts forged an alliance that was to shape late 20th-century politics

WATCH

Locations and locomotives

Perhaps because it proved such perfect comfort viewing during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic, *The Architecture the Railways Built* was one of UKTV's biggest hits last year. So it's no surprise to see it returning so soon for a new series – recorded, we're assured, in a manner consistent with "all Covid-19 procedures and regulations".

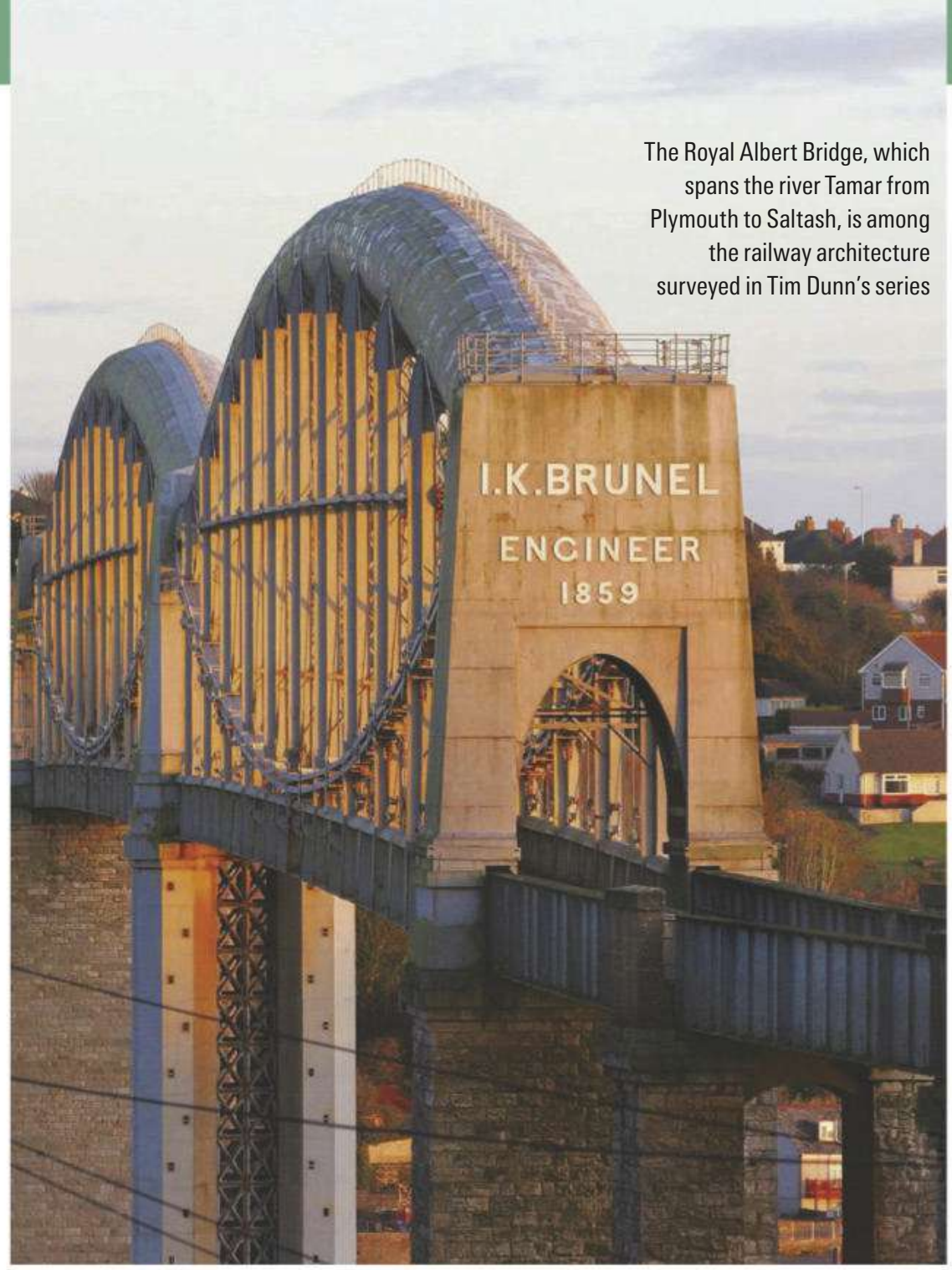
As first time around, the format is relatively simple. Historian Tim Dunn, a train enthusiast with the gift of conveying that enthusiasm to a wider audience, visits architectural landmarks that owe their existence to the railways.

In the first episode of the new series, that means visiting Wemyss Bay Station in Inverclyde, a marvel of curved lines, glass and steel designed by Scottish architect James Miller and completed in 1903.

Dunn also considers the engineering that made it possible to build Blackfriars, the only station to span the Thames, and visits Portugal to see São Bento Station, located in the historic heart of Porto.

Other locations featured in the 10-part series include the Royal Albert Bridge, designed by Isambard Kingdom Brunel and which spans the Tamar to take trains into Cornwall along the GWR ("God's Wonderful Railway") line; stations and viaducts in Windsor; and the Barrow Hill Roundhouse in Derbyshire, the only surviving working roundhouse in the UK.

The Architecture the Railways Built
Yesterday & UKTV Play / From Tuesday 19 January



The Royal Albert Bridge, which spans the river Tamar from Plymouth to Saltash, is among the railway architecture surveyed in Tim Dunn's series

Eli Goree (with bow tie) stars as Cassius Clay in *One Night in Miami*, a new film adapted from Kemp Powers' 2013 stage play

WATCH

Momentous meeting

On 25 February 1964, 7:1 underdog Cassius Clay, soon to change his name to Muhammad Ali, defeated Sonny Liston to become world heavyweight boxing champion. After the fight, Clay met with three of his friends: American football star Jim Brown, who was about to begin a Hollywood career; soul singer Sam Cooke; and civil rights activist Malcolm X, a man increasingly at odds with the Nation of Islam.

What might the quartet have talked about? That's a question that American playwright Kemp Powers attempted to answer in 2013 in his acclaimed play *One Night in Miami*, which he has now adapted for the screen. The result is a terrific drama that looks back at the struggle for civil rights, in part as a way to highlight how so many inequalities still persist.

One Night in Miami
Amazon Prime / Streaming now

GETTY IMAGES/MOVIESTILLS

Children pose for a photograph in Coventry, c1948. A Radio 4 drama aims to view 20th-century Britain's multicultural history through an intimate lens

LISTEN

Human-sized stories

The emergence and development of multicultural Britain is a subject worthy of the grandest of sweeping histories, but it's also a tale that can be told through individuals and families, their fates interweaved at a personal and domestic level. This latter idea underpins a new drama from Radio 4.

***Faith, Hope and Glory* begins over five weekday episodes with a baby, the child of Hope and Jim, getting lost at Tilbury Docks in 1946 after being entrusted to Faith to take her home to Antigua. The child is found by a celibate couple, Gloria and Clement, who decide to keep her and name her Joy. Subsequent episodes will play out over Joy's life, with the series expected to run until 2028. The cast includes Pippa Bennett-Warner as Gloria.**

Faith, Hope and Glory
BBC Radio 4 / From Monday 8 February

WEEKLY TV & RADIO
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GETTY IMAGES

HISTORY ON THE AIRWAVES

"We must break the taboos around mental health and learn from the past – and from the mistakes we made"

The writer **CLAIRE PRENTICE** tells us about her new documentary charting how lobotomy became a commonplace treatment in the mid-20th century – and what the story reveals about attitudes to mental health

How and why did you first become interested in the history of lobotomy?
I've long been interested in the history of mental illness and in the various treatments that have been used over the years. We need to break the taboos surrounding mental health and learn from the past, and from the mistakes we made in terms of how people with mental health problems were treated, by science and medicine but also by society as a whole.

Why did medics think the procedure was a good idea?
To understand why lobotomies became a part of the medical mainstream we need to put it in the context of the time. Asylums in the 1940s and 1950s were terrible places. They were overcrowded and underfunded. There were no effective treatments. Everyone – doctors, patients and their families – was desperate for a cure.

We think of lobotomists as sadists, but many were decent people trying their best, using the limited options available to them, to help their most vulnerable, desperately ill patients. What surprised me was how many patients and their families were grateful to the lobotomists for giving them hope.

How does Dr Walter Freeman fit into this story?
Walter Freeman was America's most prolific lobotomist, performing between 3,500 and 4,000 lobotomies over his long career. He devised the transorbital lobotomy in which steel implements resembling ice picks were hammered into the brain through the thin orbital bone at the back of the eye sockets. His operation could be done in under 10 minutes and was aimed at making lobotomies quicker, cheaper and easier to perform. His daughter predicted that he would become known as the "Henry Ford of lobotomy" because he had turned a complex procedure into a production line that could be rolled out to the masses.

Why and how did the use of lobotomies begin to decline?
From the mid-1950s, lobotomy began to fall out of favour, partly because of the introduction of the first wave of effective psychiatric drugs and also because of the poor results of lobotomy, which became increasingly apparent. Lobotomy was a very blunt instrument which maimed a large number of patients, leaving them unable to look after themselves. And depictions of lobotomy in films, books and plays such as *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and *Suddenly, Last Summer* drew the public's attention to the horrors of what was increasingly being seen as a barbaric medical procedure. H

Archive On 4: Easier Than Curing a Toothache? The Story of Lobotomy is broadcast on Saturday 30 January at 8pm

Jack Nicholson in the 1975 film adaptation of Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*

TASTE

Sly cakes

These pastries are sweet fare – whether or not you use them to smuggle love notes

This sweet treat from the north of England is thought to date from the 19th century. Its name indicates both its surprisingly rich filling, belying its seemingly dull exterior – but also a tale of young love.

It's said that a baker's daughter in South Shields fell in love with a man who lived on her street, and smuggled love letters into cakes that she gave him when he bought something from her father's shop. After five years of cake communication, they sought permission to marry – but were denied. It's hard to get in the way of romance in such stories, though, and elopement, marriage and love are still said to have followed.

Even if this story is merely a tall tale, these delectable pastries are still worth a try.

Difficulty: 4/10
Preparation time: 15 minutes, plus time to make and chill the pastry in the fridge
Baking time: 40 minutes

INGREDIENTS

For the pastry:
275g plain flour
100g butter
50g lard
50g caster sugar
A pinch of salt

For the filling:
225g dried figs
75g walnuts
100g sultanas
150ml water
Milk for glazing

METHOD

1. Place the flour and salt in a bowl with the butter and lard. Rub in until the mixture starts to stick together. Stir in the sugar and then add water a little at a time to make a dough. Chill in the fridge while you make the filling.
2. Chop the figs and walnuts and add to a pan with the sultanas. Add the water to the pan and cook, stirring all the time until the water evaporates. Leave to cool.
3. Preheat the oven to 190°C, gas mark 5. Grease a rectangular baking tin. Divide the pastry into two pieces and roll out one half to fit in the baking tin.
4. Spread the fruit on top, then roll out the other piece of pastry and place on top. Glaze with milk.
5. Bake for 40 minutes, until golden.
6. Leave to cool, and then cut into rectangles.

Recipe by Dragons and Fairy Dust: dragonsandfairydust.co.uk/regional-recipes-sly-cakes

The ways in which da Vinci's drawings shaped our view of the human body are explored in a new radio series

SAMANTHA NOTT/ALAMY

LISTEN

Body talk

To think and to talk about the human body, contends anatomist Alice Roberts, is to realise how our perceptions of our bodies shape how we see the world. In particular, she says, the notion of framing concepts in opposition becomes clear: technology and humanity, invisible and visible, body and soul.

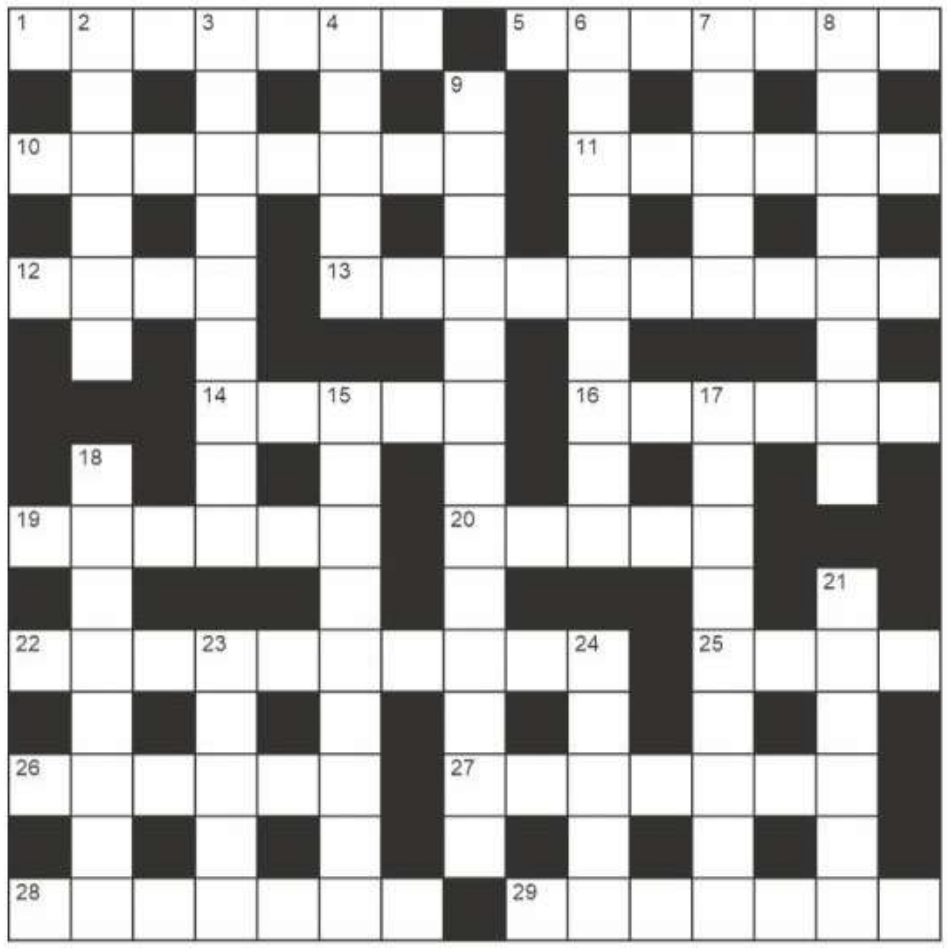
It's an insight that underpins Roberts' new series for Radio 4, which over 10 weekday episodes considers how our knowledge of anatomy has changed over the years, and how this in turn has changed how we think about ourselves.

Travelling through time, Roberts begins in the prehistoric era. Did our ancestors see their bodies as being similar to those of the animals they hunted? Or were their own bodies somehow different, special? She also considers how ancient civilisations, such as those of Egypt and Greece – the latter being home to Aristotle the anatomist – viewed the human body.

In the second week of shows, dissection, pioneered by Herophilus and Erasistratus in Alexandria in the third century BC, is a recurring theme. As well as marvelling at the intricate and beautifully executed drawings of polymath Leonardo da Vinci, who performed more than 30 dissections, Roberts also tells less familiar stories. In the 17th century, we learn, Dutch anatomists used preserved body parts to create gruesome scenes as they turned their dissection theatres into museums of curiosities. H

Bodies
BBC Radio 4 & BBC Sounds /
From Monday 18 January

PRIZE CROSSWORD



Across

1 US linguist who ushered in the "cognitive revolution" and was an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War (7)
5 Roman historian and politician (c86–35 BC), from an Italian plebeian family (7)
10 A triple one, made by Itzcóatl (ruled c1427–40), was the foundation of the Aztec empire (8)
11 The ____Museum, whose name derives from the Roman name for Chichester, is built over the Roman baths in the city (6)
12 A great Sumerian city, thought to be Erech in the Bible (Genesis) (4)
13 One example of this practice occurred from the 16th to the 19th centuries, between Africa and the Americas (5,5)
14 The ____ ____(or "Pinkville") massacre, a notorious incident involving US troops in the Vietnam War (2,3)
16 Perhaps the most famous one was established in 27 BC and lasted to AD 476 (6)
19 William, 17th-century English navigator, after whom Canada's largest island is named (6)
20 Mary ____Eddy, the American founder of Christian Science (5)
22 Berkshire agriculturist and inventor of a seed drill machine, a major figure in Britain's agricultural revolution (6,4)
25 Paramilitary group claiming responsibility for the Northern Ireland secretary's assassination outside the Palace of Westminster in 1979 (4)
26 Town on a promontory of ancient Greece, where Octavian had his famous victory over Antony and Cleopatra (6)
27 One of the first two people known to have reached the summit of Everest, ____Norgay (7)
28 Giuseppe ____(1805–72), founder of the secret revolutionary society, Young Italy, and champion of Italian unity (7)
29 The first person to swim it, without artificial aids, was Captain Matthew Webb in 1875 (7)

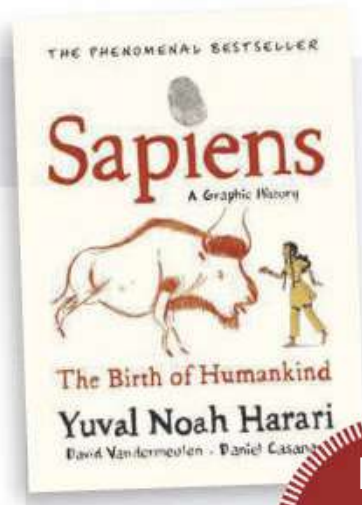
Down

2 First name of the British author of the acclaimed trilogy of books about the rise and fall of Thomas Cromwell (6)
3 The political manifesto written by Adolf Hitler, the first volume of which was begun while he was in prison (4,5)
4 Books of the Bible, part of the group of Deuteronomic history books written during the Babylonian Exile (sixth century BC) (5)
6 A celebrated US mountaineer and an ardent suffragist; a Peruvian peak was named in her honour in 1927 (5,4)
7 Simple machine, used eg in ancient Egypt to move and lift large blocks of stone (5)
8 Edith Rebecca ____, 19th/20th-century botanist known as the "mother of British plant genetics" (8)
9 Pakistani politician, the first female leader of a Muslim state in modern times (7,6)
15 Bog body, from the Iron Age or Roman Britain era, found in Cheshire in 1984 (6,3)
17 The political division of a country, such as India in 1947 (9)
18 Spanish city captured by the Moors in the early eighth century, taken by El Cid in 1094 and retaken by the Moors in 1102 (8)
21 One of the worst in history was the Black Death in medieval Europe (6)
23 19th-century US entrepreneur Henry J ____, whose company's slogan was "57 Varieties" (5)
24 John R ____: born into slavery in Louisiana in 1847, he went on to become a Republican member of the US House of Representatives (5)

GETTY IMAGES

Who is this acclaimed US mountaineer and suffragist? *(see 6 down)*

Compiled by **Eddie James**



Book worth £18.99 for 5 winners

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By Yuval Noah Harari and collaborators

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HOW TO ENTER

● Open to residents of the UK (& Channel Islands). Post entries to ***BBC History Magazine*, February 2021 Crossword, PO Box 501, Leicester LE94 0AA** or email them to ***february2021@historycomps.co.uk*** by 5pm on **17 February 2021**. ● Entrants must supply full name, address and phone number. The winners will be the first correct entries drawn at random after the closing time. Winners' names will appear in the April 2021 issue. By entering, participants agree to be bound by the terms and conditions shown in full in the box below. Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) will use personal details in accordance with the Immediate Privacy Policy at *immediatemedia.co.uk/privacy-policy/privacy/* ● Immediate Media Company Ltd (publishers of *BBC History Magazine*) would love to send you newsletters, together with special offers and other promotions. If you would not like to receive these, please write 'NO INFO' on your entry. ● Branded BBC titles are licensed from or published jointly with BBC Studios (the commercial arm of the BBC). Please tick here ❑ if you'd like to receive regular newsletters, special offers and promotions from BBC Studios by email. Your information will be handled in accordance with the BBC Studios privacy policy: *bbcstudios.com/privacy. – bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/code-of-conduct*

Solution to our Christmas 2020 crossword

Across 1 Tapestry 5 Tom Paine 9 Bounty 10 Newbury 12 Jena 13/17 Mary Somerville 14 Assyria 15 Rizzio 16 Aesop 22 Little Rock 23 Las Casas 25 Bodleian 27 Queen Mary 29 New Orleans 31 Livia 34 Dymoke 35 Tunisia 37 Nagy 38 Metz 39 Henry II 40 Oracle 41 Reform Act 42 Hanratty
Down: 1 Thomas Edison 2 Penny Post 3 Skylab 4 Runes 5 Teuta 6 Mayoral 7 Al-Jazeera 8 Nuncio 11 Warbeck 18 O'Connor 19 Villein 20 Levi 21 Mary Kingsley 24 Song 26 London Zoo 27 Quesnay 28 Aliens Act 30 Wrexham 32 Cyrene 33 Labour 35 Tunic 36 Shiva

Winner of a bundle of new history books:
W Pitt, Gloucestershire

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Find inspiration for your next adventure with these historic venues
Also check out their websites to learn about the rich stories behind them all!

KENT

Canterbury Cathedral

Discover England's First Cathedral. UNESCO World Heritage Site, seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and resting place of saints and royalty, Canterbury Cathedral's thrilling history spans over 1,400 years, telling the stories that have shaped England. From stunning stained glass and architecture to large open grounds, there's plenty to explore.

enquiries@canterbury-cathedral.org// canterbury-cathedral.org

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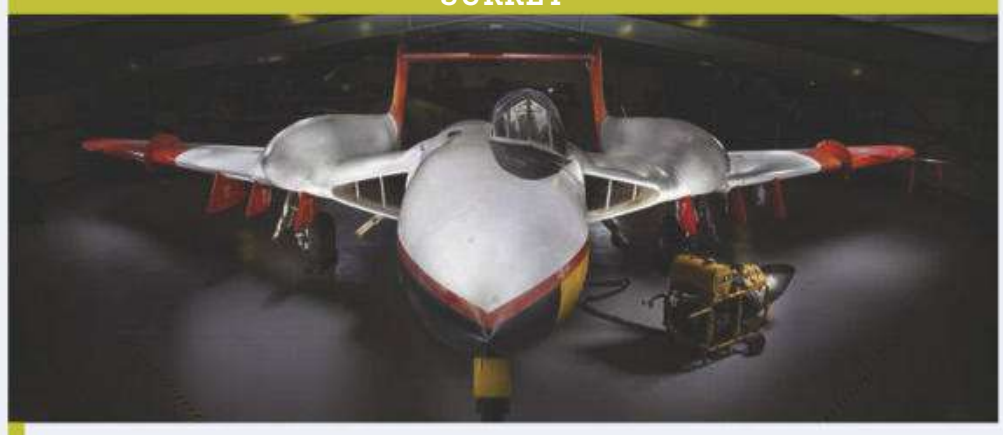
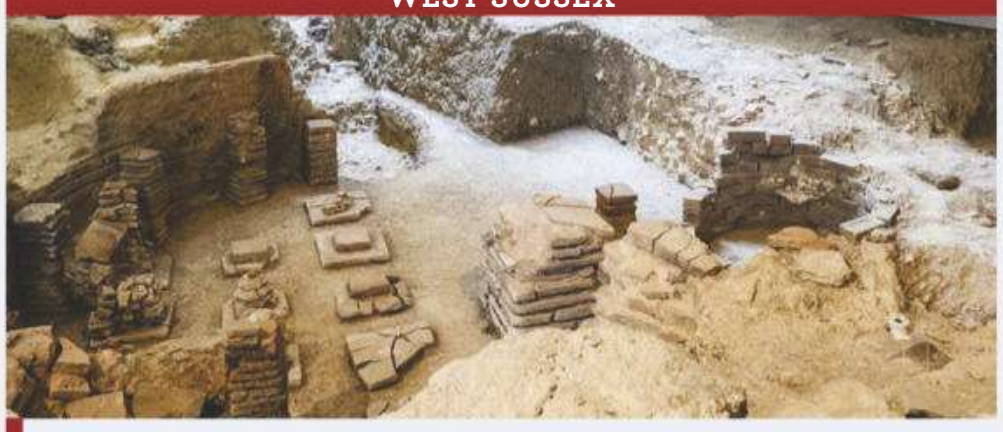


Gatwick Aviation Museum

This Aviation Museum in Gatwick has a unique collection of British aircraft from the "golden age" of British aircraft manufacture. From the end of WWII until the 1970s British aircraft designers produced some of the most innovative and advanced aircraft of the day.

01293 862417 // gatwick-aviation-museum.co.uk

WEST SUSSEX

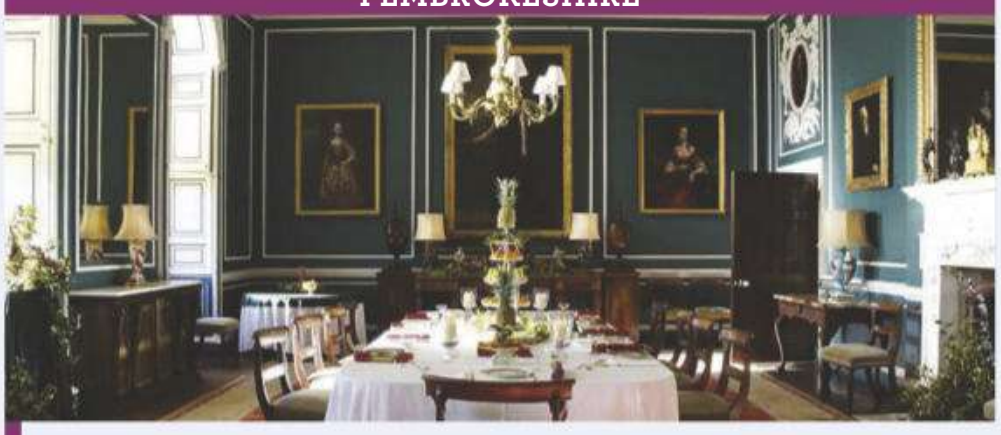


The Novium Museum

Chichester District's award-winning museum is situated in the heart of the city centre. Built over an exposed Roman bathhouse, it has three floors of fascinating exhibitions and displays. Every May half term the museum hosts Chichester Roman Week featuring a large scale re-enactment, talks, trails, guided tours, family activities and more.

01243 775888 // thenovium.org

PEMBROKESHIRE



Picton Castle & Gardens

Set in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and surrounded by a 40 acre RHS Partner Garden, Picton Castle originated in the 13th century, with a splendid Georgian wing added in the 1790s. A treasured family home for over 700 years, the elegant rooms feature opulent French furnishings, fireplaces and fine works of art including the controversial 'Picton Renoir'.

01437 751326 // pictoncastle.co.uk

SOUTH YORKSHIRE

National Emergency Services Museum

Based in a historic fire, police and ambulance station, Sheffield's National Emergency Services Museum is the world's largest joint 999 museum. Across three floors of interactive displays, hands-on history and vintage vehicles we tell the story of the country's emergency services and their extraordinary heritage.

From the days of steam and horse power to modern vehicles, and from original Victorian cells to a full-sized lifeboat, there's something for all the family to enjoy. The museum also hosts a series of special events throughout the year, giving visitors the chance to further discover the remarkable work of the emergency services.

0114 2491 999 // emergencymuseum.org.uk

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A selection of the exciting content on our website **historyextra.com**

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historyextra.com/podcasts2020

A brief guide to Neanderthals

Neanderthals are often dismissed as brutish and primitive. In this piece, archaeologist Rebecca Wragg Sykes sets the record straight, providing an introduction to Neanderthals and how they relate to modern humans.
historyextra.com/neanderthals-facts

Board games for history lovers

Move over, Monopoly! For history fans, there are plenty of board games that use the past for inspiration, from several quick card games to multi-hour, world-saving epics.
historyextra.com/history-games

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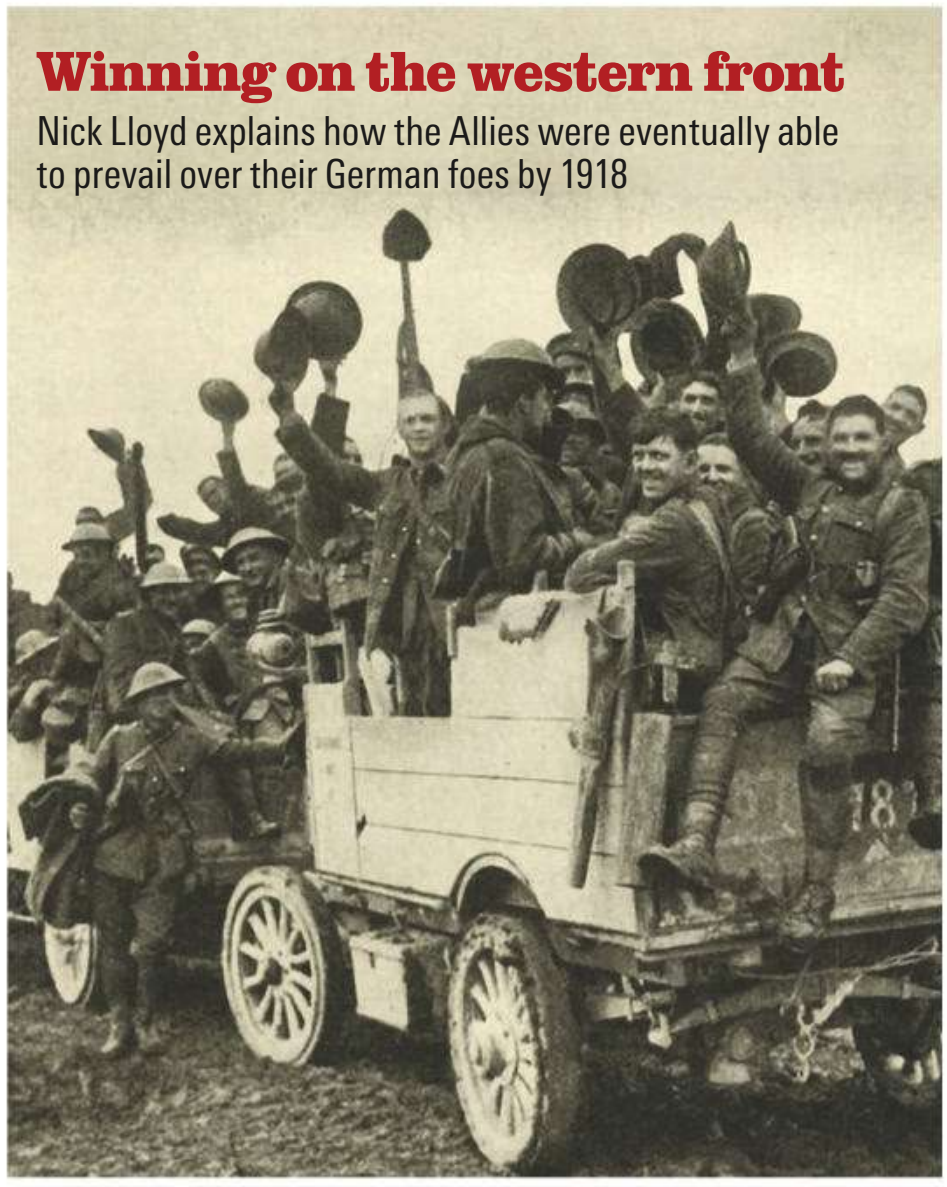
historyextra.com/monarchy-quiz

GETTY IMAGES/BRIDGEMAN

NEXT MONTH

March issue on sale 18 February 2021



Winning on the western front

Nick Lloyd explains how the Allies were eventually able to prevail over their German foes by 1918

The missing man

David Musgrove considers why a key player in the drama of 1066 doesn't feature in the Bayeux Tapestry

Ultimate Victorian

Fiona Sampson on the eventful life of the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning

New Vikings

Cat Jarman reveals what the latest scientific research can tell us about the medieval Norse people

MY HISTORY HERO

Julia Donaldson, children's writer, chooses

Katherine Howard, Lady Aubigny

died 1650

A c1638 oil painting of Katherine Howard, Lady Aubigny. She was a staunch royalist and helped orchestrate a failed plot to free Charles

IN PROFILE

Katherine Howard, Lady Aubigny was a noblewoman and royalist during the Civil War. In 1638 she married her first husband, George Stewart, 9th Seigneur d'Aubigny, who was killed at the battle of Edgehill (1642). She was later imprisoned in the Tower of London for her royalist activities. After being released she tried but failed to free Charles I from captivity. Following his execution she fled to the Netherlands with her second husband, James Livingston, Earl of Newburgh, where she died in 1650, age unknown.

> My hands shook as I examined letters written to Katherine in code by King Charles I, when he was imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle

When did you first hear about Katherine Howard? When studying 17th-century English history for A-level. I went to a talk by the historian CV Wedgwood, and I was so inspired by her account of the part played by Katherine Howard, Lady Aubigny, in the Civil War. She had been an active royalist and smuggled a commission of array [a summons to arms] from King Charles I concealed in her hair. I thought that sounded so romantic!

I contacted her [Wedgwood] to find out more, and she wrote a very nice letter back. There and then I resolved to discover more about her, with a view to writing Katherine's biography. I spent much of the three months between school and university in the manuscript room of the British Museum. My hands shook when I was allowed to examine letters written to her in code by Charles I when he was imprisoned in Carisbrooke Castle.

What kind of woman was she? Katherine was obviously very adventurous, and also rather rebellious and independent: she went against her Protestant father's wishes by secretly marrying the Catholic George Stewart, 9th Seigneur d'Aubigny (who was later killed at the battle of Edgehill). But she was also quite a diplomat. During the interregnum, when she had fled to the continent, she was at pains to reconcile the different factions who wanted the monarchy to be restored.

What was her finest hour? Apart from smuggling the commission of array in her hair, she later attempted to prevent the king's execution. He was allowed to stay with her and her second husband, James Livingston, Viscount Newburgh, on his way from the Isle of Wight to London; the couple reputedly possessed the fastest horse in the country and planned for Charles to escape on it, but their plot was thwarted.

Is there anything that you don't particularly admire about Katherine? As a teenager, I was very much on the side of the Cavaliers, finding the Roundheads rather dull and prosaic. Nowadays, however, I don't think that I would necessarily share Katherine's royalist political views.

Have you ever thought of writing a children's book about her? When I was 18, I did actually begin to write her biography – though it wasn't really intended for children. I covered her childhood and got as far as her secret marriage. I do sometimes fantasise about completing the book – but the trouble is that so much would be guesswork, as the records are very scanty.

What would you ask Katherine if you could meet her? I'd ask her to write her autobiography! H

Julia Donaldson was taking to York Membery

Julia Donaldson, a former Children's Laureate, is best known for her books *The Gruffalo* and *Stick Man*. Her latest book, *The Hospital Dog*, is out now

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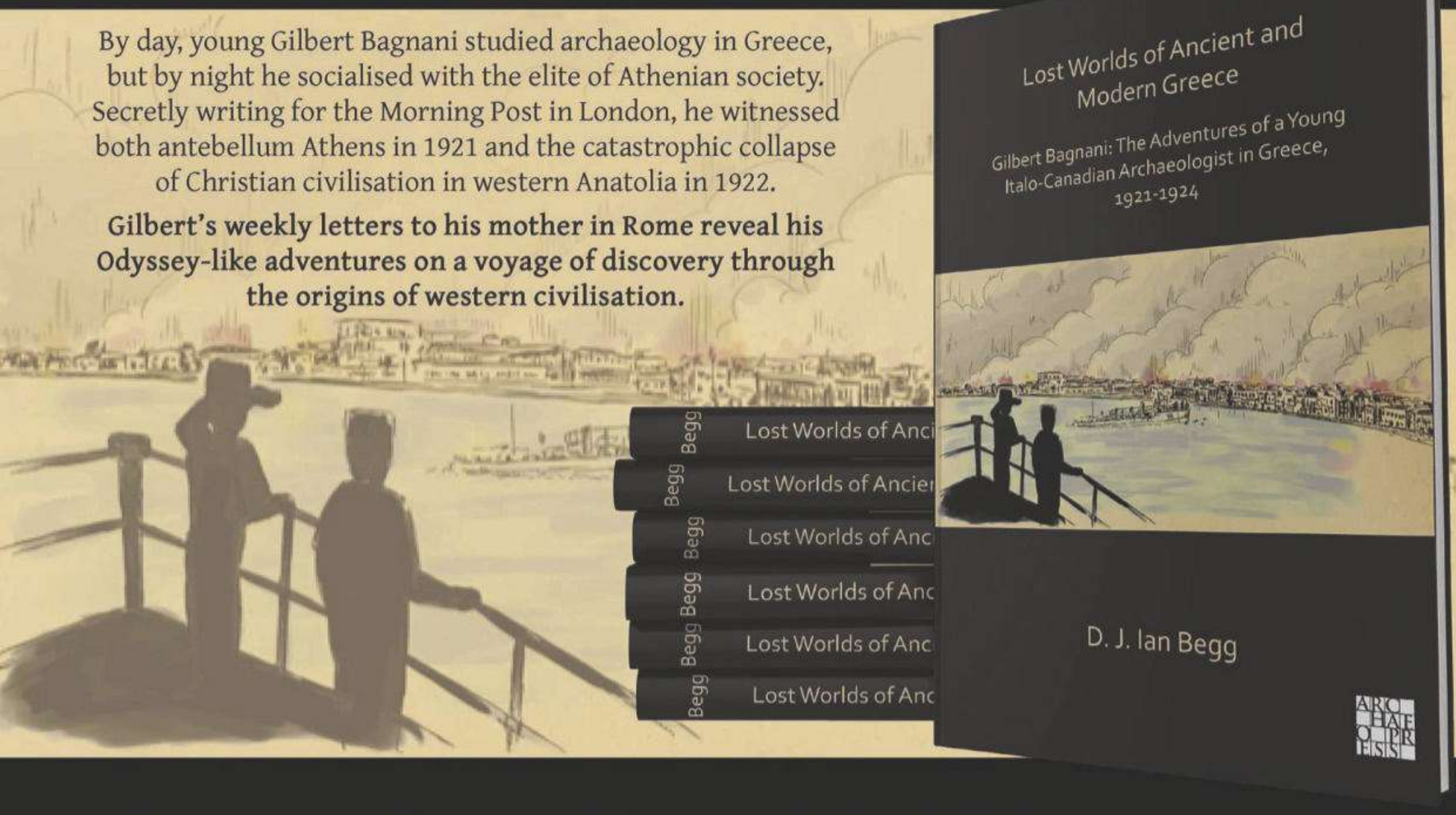
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Bagnani and Begg paint sparkling pen pictures of personalities such as Bosdari, the Italian ambassador during the Great War, Prince Demidoff the Russian ambassador, Harold Lamb the British Consul at Smyrna and family... Gilbert emerges as clever, sometimes arrogant, fascinated by people especially from high society, and with a weakness for royalty. Begg does him justice in [this] lively account of a formidable personality, scholar and archaeologist in the making.
– Sir Michael Llewellyn Smith, British Ambassodor to Greece 1996-99

Gilbert Bagnani, of Italian and Canadian extraction, arrived in Greece at the age of 21, ostensibly to study Greek Archaeology and participate in fieldwork... However, secretly, he was sending well-informed reports on the dynamic political situation in Greece and between Greece and Turkey to a London newspaper, while later spying for Mussolini. This first of three volumes, based on his personal letters and news reports, covers the momentous years from 1921-1924, which witnessed the disastrous failure of the Greek invasion of Western Turkey, the sack of Smyrna, a military coup and executions in Greece... Informative, excellently-edited and a delight to read. – ***Professor John Bintliff, Edinburgh University***

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